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Editorial

With this edition of the *Journal* we enter our fourteenth year of issue. We have published in excess of 130 scholarly articles, many emanating from younger scholars and from within the community of learning we call IBTS.

Our first article is by Joshua Searle who was an outstanding student at IBTS, gaining a distinction in his Master's degree and going on to doctoral studies at Trinity College, Dublin. He has recently been appointed to a tutorship at Spurgeon's College (Baptist) in London. Joshua is a convinced baptistic Christian, but has an ecumenical vision, not least by his formation within an IBTS partner, the Northumbria Community. In his article he addresses his commitment to ecumenism by exploring what the baptistic perspective might bring to the table. This is an important theme for IBTS; within our community of learners a key figure has been Professor John HY Briggs, who served for many years on the Central Committee and Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches. Another honoured scholar amongst us has been the Revd Dr Ian M Randall, who has written important histories of several key evangelical groupings. So, the theme is both apposite and appropriate to the life and mission of IBTS.

The second major article is by Olga Zaprometova from the Pentecostal tradition in Russia, who explores what insights might be gained from Orthodoxy as we engage in Eucharistic worship. Again, this brings together two abiding interests of the IBTS community where exploring Eucharistic worship and experiencing such worship has been at the forefront of weekly community life in Prague. Engaging in constructive dialogue with Orthodoxy in terms of its worship, ecclesiology, theology and mission has also been very important to us. We welcome this contribution which adds a fresh and dynamic perspective.

Finally, the book review by Ian Randall on the history of IBTS by Carol Woodfin, tells the story of IBTS from 1948 – 2012 in her engaging *An Experiment on Christian Internationalism: A History of the European Baptist Theological Seminary*. Carol has spent a decade working through archives, minute books and documents, and interviewing key figures in the story, carefully weighing and analysing the evidence. She is one of many Baptist historians who have been formed by this 'experiment in Christian Internationalism'. Ian Randall commends the book to us all as a 'good read'. It deals deftly with awkward moments, the constant challenge of currency fluctuation, struggles to survive in the centre of Baptist politics, and interaction between the 'owners' (the Trustees) and the users. If you want some insight into the institution behind this *Journal*, here is no better source – scholarly, comprehensive, illuminating.

The Revd Dr Keith G Jones
Senior Research Fellow, IBTS

The Ecumenical Imperative and the Kingdom of God:

Towards a baptistic perspective on church unity

Joshua T Searle

I. Introduction

One of the central claims of the late James Wm McClendon Jr (1924-2000) was that baptistic communities constitute a worldwide Christian grouping with a distinctive theological heritage.¹ Baptist theology is neither Protestant nor Catholic, neither Reformed nor Lutheran, but *baptist*.² The designation, ‘baptist’, as Curtis W. Freeman remarks, is ‘not so much a denominational, historical, or sociological account as much as it is a theological standpoint’.³ Yet this distinctive theological vision emerged neither out of doctrinal formulations nor from the desks of academic theologians, but out of ‘the convictions and practices that comprise the lived-out shared life in Christ’.⁴ The distinctiveness of baptistic theological identity – as a perspective that is neither Catholic nor Protestant⁵ – has been developed by leading Baptist theologians, such as Walter Klaassen and James McClendon.⁶ These writers were heavily indebted to the theological

¹ James Wm McClendon Jr, *Systematic Theology: Volume One: Ethics*, 2nd edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), pp. 26-34. McClendon indicts Baptists on account of their alleged failure to recognise ‘in their own heritage, their own way of using Scripture, their own communal practices, their own guiding vision, a resource for theology unlike the prevailing tendencies around them’.

² Note the intentionality of the lower-case ‘b’. McClendon wants to emphasise that the vision which he advocates is not confined to a specific ‘Baptist’ denomination, but encompasses a whole range of ‘baptistic’ expressions of Christianity, associated with the tradition of the Radical Reformation, including Baptists, Mennonites, Brethren, some expressions of Pentecostalism, and believers’ churches among others (*Ethics*, pp. 26-34). This approach, admittedly, is not without its critics, even among those who are sympathetic towards those who favour the ‘baptistic’ rather than ‘Baptist label’. Paul Fiddes notes the danger that this label could be used to create ‘a highly personalized view of what it means to be baptist’; Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), p. 14.

³ Freeman, ‘Introduction’, in McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Ethics*, 2nd edition, revised and enlarged with an Introduction by Curtis W. Freeman (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), p. xii.

⁴ Curtis W. Freeman et al (eds.), ‘Preface’, *Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999), p. ix.

⁵ Mark Noll, while acknowledging that the doctrinal contributions of the early Anabaptists did ‘represent differences from traditional Protestant teaching’, nevertheless considers the followers of the Radical Reformation to have been essentially ‘Protestant’ in their theology; Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 224-5. Referenced in P.R. Parushev, *Christianity in Europe: The Way We Are Now* (Oxford: CMS, 2009), p. 14.

⁶ A classic work that set out baptistic theology as a distinctive ‘third way’ is Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant* (Waterloo, Ontario: Conrad, 1973); for McClendon’s exposition of the distinctiveness of baptistic theology, see his *Systematic Theology* trilogy. See also, Parush Parushev, ‘Doing Theology in a Baptist Way (Theologie op een baptistenmanier)’, in Teun van der Leer, (ed.), *Zo zijn onze manieren! In Gesprek over gemeentetheologie, Baptistica Reeks* (Barneveld,

vision of the early Anabaptists, which, according to Harold Bender, included three major emphases: ‘first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second, a new conception of the Church as a brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and non-resistance’.⁷

The aims of what follows are twofold: (1) to help Baptists better understand the ‘baptist vision’ that (consciously or unconsciously) has informed the faith and practice of the worldwide baptistic community since at least the time of the Radical Reformation; and (2) to help ecumenical companions understand the richness and diversity of baptistic convictions. Part one thus explores the contested issue of baptistic identity through the paradigm of McClendon’s notion of the baptist vision. The second part combines the insights gained in part one into baptistic identity by interpreting them against a backdrop of ecumenical endeavours towards establishing unity and co-operation among diverse ecclesial communities. Drawing synoptically on the insights of parts one and two, the third and final part will explore the potential transformative application of the baptist vision towards the enrichment of contemporary ecumenical dialogue.

This structure announces the main aim of the paper, which is to explore ways in which the baptist vision can be put to the service of the unity of the church. The aim is neither to provide a comprehensive history of baptistic involvement with the ecumenical movement⁸ nor to offer a complete account of the convergence of baptistic ecclesiology and ecumenical convictions. Detailed and perceptive elucidation of these convergences can be found in several articles and monographs.⁹ One particularly noteworthy contribution is Steven R. Harmon’s work entitled, *Towards Baptist Catholicity*.¹⁰ Arguing that the reconstruction of an

Nederland: Unie van Baptisten Gemeenten in Nederland, September 2009, in Dutch), pp. 7-22 and 66-75; Helen Dare and Simon Woodman (eds.), *The Plainly Revealed Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011).

⁷ Harold Bender, quoted in G.R. Elton (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History II: The Reformation 1520-1559* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 133.

⁸ In relation to the twentieth-century British context, this issue receives extensive treatment in Anthony Cross, *Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and Practice in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), pp. 244-318. See also Anthony Cross, ‘Service to the Ecumenical Movement: The Contribution of British Baptists’, *Baptist Quarterly* 38.3 (July 1999), pp. 107-122. See also, J.H.Y. Briggs, ‘Baptists and the Ecumenical Movement’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol.6, No. 1 (September 2005).

⁹ Notable resources include: Parush Parushev, ‘A Baptist’s Perspective on the Ecumenical Plurality of Missional Witness to the Way of Christ’, in Bernd Jochen Hilberath, Ivana Noble, Johannes Oeldemann, Peter De Mey (eds.), *Ökumene des Lebens als Herausforderung der wissenschaftlichen Theologie/Ecumenism of Life as a Challenge for Academic Theology* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2008), pp. 275-296; Wilbert R. Shenk and Peter F. Penner (eds.), *Anabaptism and Mission*, (Erlangen, Germany: Neufeld Verlag Schwartzenfeld, 2007); and Dare and Woodman (eds.), *The Plainly Revealed Word of God?*.

¹⁰ Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006).

authentic Baptist identity requires a renewed focus on the ancient ecumenical identity of the church, Harmon considers the ways in which Baptist approaches to theology interact with other Christian traditions from the Church Fathers to Karl Barth. This article has a complimentary but different purpose. Whereas most of the works cited above considered the issue of how an openness to the ecumenical dimension of the church can facilitate the development of an authentic Baptist identity, the aim of this paper is to consider how an openness to the baptist vision can facilitate the formation of an inclusive ecumenical identity, even among churches that do not explicitly identify with the baptist vision.

This article raises important issues that lie at the heart of both baptistic and ecumenical identity. One such issue concerns the question of whether or not ecumenical endeavours towards the attainment of the unity of the church arise organically out of baptistic ecclesial identity.¹¹ The argument will be that openness to ecumenical dialogue is a core baptistic conviction that arises naturally from its history as a community of believers who profess to be living witnesses to the hope and reconciliation of Christ. Ecumenical dialogue can be advanced through a proper formulation of the baptist vision as a particular model of embodied witness, which has been formative of the identity of baptistic communities since the time of the Radical Reformation. Moreover, it is possible for Baptists to be loyally and wholeheartedly committed to their own unique ecclesial tradition without believing that it embodies final and exclusive truth, and without thereby abandoning the hope that there is more to be learned from other traditions.

II. The Baptist Vision

Doctrinally, Baptists are aligned with the historical faith professed by the mainline Christian denominations. One of the main points of divergence between the Baptists and the churches of the mainstream Christian traditions is the Baptists' identification of themselves as a 'believer's' church or as a 'gathered' (or 'gathering')¹² church. Rejecting the 'Constantinian' assumption that one is born into the faith or is a Christian simply through family ties or connections to civil authorities, baptistic churches tend to be disciplined and dedicated communities of believers

¹¹ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, pp. 193ff.

¹² The term 'gathering' is preferred by Keith G. Jones as being a more faithful model that better represents the porosity and inclusivity that have been the hallmarks of baptistic communities since the Radical Reformation. See Jones, *A Believing Church: Learning from Some Contemporary Anabaptist and Baptist Perspectives* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1998). See also N.G. Wright, *New Baptists: New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster: 2002), p. 76.

who have responded freely to the call of the gospel.¹³ This conviction that one must make a free decision to follow Christ rather than simply being born into a church subculture underlies the belief for which Baptists are probably best known: namely their rejection of infant baptism and avowal of believer's baptism.¹⁴

Baptists constitute one of the largest Christian communities in the world. The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) is a worldwide confederation of Baptist communities. Formed in London in 1905, the BWA now unites over 200 Baptist groups consisting of nearly fifty million baptised believers in almost every country in the world. There are several other groups that self-identify as 'Baptists' that are not affiliated with the BWA, most notably the 25-million strong Southern Baptist Convention in North America, which sadly withdrew from the Alliance in 2004 after 99 years of membership and much generous funding to the mission of the BWA. The BWA is divided into six regional fellowships worldwide, one of which is the European Baptist Federation, which brings together 51 Baptist unions from Russia and Georgia to Lebanon and Great Britain.¹⁵ The BWA is committed to promoting good ecumenical relations and has been engaged in sustained dialogue with mainline churches, most notably with the Catholic Church in 1984-1988 and 2006-2010 and with the Anglican Church between 1992 and 2005.¹⁶

Given the diversity of the worldwide Baptist family, it is legitimate for our ecumenical partners to ask whether Baptists are even capable of offering anything resembling a coherent baptistic theological perspective that could make a meaningful contribution to ecumenical dialogue. From the time of the Reformation to the present day, baptistic identity has been a hugely contested issue.¹⁷ At certain points in history, when the mere

¹³ A classic statement of this baptistic conviction is to be found in E.Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1908).

¹⁴ For a survey of how believer's baptism is related to other aspects of baptistic identity and ecumenical relations with other churches, see Paul Fiddes (ed.), *Reflections on the Water: Understanding God and the World Through the Baptism of Believers* (Smyth and Helwys, 1996). Baptist historians identify the restriction of baptism to believers as 'the most distinctive characteristic ... which sets [Baptists] apart from the other major historic denominations'. Cross, *Baptism and the Baptists*, p. 1.

¹⁵ For an informative and well-researched history of the EBF, written by a prominent contemporary Baptist ecumenist, see Keith G. Jones, *The European Baptist Federation: A Case Study in European Baptist Interdependency, 1950-2006* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009).

¹⁶ The results of the Baptist-Anglican dialogue were published in a report entitled, *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity: Anglicans and Baptists in Conversation* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005). Other conversations have been held with the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Mennonite World Conference, whilst preliminary conversations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate are yet to be fully followed up. See Ken Manley, *The Baptist World Alliance and Inter-Church Relationships* (BWA, 2003) for a full account of bilateral conversations.

¹⁷ R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2005).

identification of oneself as an ‘anabaptist’ was punishable with death by drowning or burning, the question of baptistic identity has been quite literally a matter of life and death.¹⁸ Such are the complexities and nuances of baptistic identity that it would be impossible to give an account that would satisfy even a fraction of the diverse perspectives on this intricate question. The aim here, therefore, is not to settle the issue regarding a comprehensive account of contemporary baptistic identity. The goal is the more manageable – yet no less significant – one of finding a reference point or a common hermeneutic on which the manifold diverse strands of baptistic thinking coalesce.

The question of baptistic identity of the Baptists is tied up invariably with the issue of the origins of the movement. There is disagreement among historians about how and when the Baptists emerged as a distinctive group. Some argue that the Baptists emerged as a radical offshoot of the mainline protestant churches following the Reformation.¹⁹ Others contend that the true roots of the movement are to be found in the continental Anabaptist tradition.²⁰ Still others have maintained that ‘Baptists’ have existed in one form or other since the time of Christ and the early church.²¹ There is one particular account of baptistic identity offered by the Baptist theologian, James McClendon, which seems particularly persuasive from a historical and theological perspective.²² This approach, with its emphasis on inclusivity and perspectivism, lends itself in a particular way to the development of a generous ecumenism in which all dialogue partners

¹⁸ Neta Jackson, *On Fire for Christ: Stories of Anabaptist Martyrs* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 1989).

¹⁹ Barrington R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (London, Baptist Historical Society, 1983); William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (2 volumes, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971). W. T. Whitley, *A History of the British Baptists* (London: Griffin, 1923).

²⁰ Glen Stassen, ‘Anabaptist Influences in the Origin of the Particular Baptists’, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (October, 1962), pp. 322-348; Stassen, ‘Revisioning Baptist Identity by Naming Our Origin and Character Rightly’, *Baptist History and Heritage* 33:2 (Spring, 1998), pp. 45-54; William Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). Significantly, the greatest Baptist ecumenist of the twentieth century, E. A. Payne, argued strongly for the historical links between the Baptists and Anabaptists. Payne was the only Baptist President of the World Council of Churches and before that served for many years as Vice-Chair of the WCC Executive Committee.

²¹ Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan, Taylor, 1887). The issue of successionism has been dealt with critically in W. Morgan Patterson, *Baptist Successionism: A Critical View* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1969) and Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-49* (London: Woodbridge, 2006).

²² In the judgement of Baptist theologian, Parush R. Parushev, ‘McClendon is to be credited with being one of the first to derive plausible ‘anti-foundational’ systematic implications for a theological method from a careful study of convictions imbedded in the practices of life.’ See Parushev, ‘Convictions and the Shape of Moral Reasoning’, in Parush R. Parushev, Ovidiu Creangă, Brian Brock (eds.), *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning, Proceedings of the 3rd Annual Theological Symposium of the International Postgraduate Theological Fellowship*, 14-16 February 2007 (Prague: IBTS, 2007) in IBTS Occasional Publications Series, volume 7, pp. 26-44.

convene and converse on equal terms. The baptist vision, as McClendon formulates it, is capable of perceiving the common vocation of the church amid the wide diversity of ecclesial traditions in which this vocation finds expression. This usefulness of approach is thus not confined to its potential to promote greater awareness and understanding of the various baptistic traditions in church history, but also has a contemporary application to the promotion of good relations between Baptists and their ecumenical partners.

The characteristic features of baptistic communities that have been identified by historians and theologians fall into five general headings. These are: biblicism;²³ liberty;²⁴ discipleship;²⁵ community;²⁶ and mission.²⁷ For followers of the baptist vision, the Bible is the normative text which is revered, not on account of any alleged claims to inerrancy, but as the fullest disclosure of God's revelation which renders the Bible the superlative authority *for* faith and practice. Liberty is conceived not as an anarchic overhaul of authority but has a positive content as the embodied spiritual principle, which recognises the God-given freedom of individuals and churches to respond (or, indeed, not to respond) to the initiatives of divine grace.²⁸ Individuals have the freedom to respond in obedience by following the way of Christ on the way of discipleship. Mennonite historian, Harold Bender, claimed that this was the primary distinguishing mark of baptistic communities. Whereas, for the Reformers the most important word was 'faith', for the Anabaptists the central word was 'following'.²⁹ The other distinguishing factor is identified as community, which emphasises the notion of the church as the people of God who are joined together 'in a storied life of witness to Christ exercised in mutual aid

²³ Donovan Smucker, 'The Theological Triumph of the Early Anabaptists', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 19:1 (October, 1945).

²⁴ Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*; Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 1993).

²⁵ Harold Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1944).

²⁶ F.H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (Boston: Starr King, 1952).

²⁷ James Wm. McClendon Jr, *Systematic Theology: Volume 3: Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000).

²⁸ This was the fundamental claim that informed the radical appeal to religious freedom of Thomas Helwys (c.1575–c.1616), one of the first leaders of the British Baptists. Helwys' *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, first published in 1611, is widely regarded as the first systematic appeal for religious liberty to have been published in the English language. Helwys was arrested for his radical views and he died in prison around 1616, most likely from the effects of his imprisonment. In 1524, shortly before he was burned at the stake in Vienna, the early Anabaptist leader, Balthasar Hubmaier, made a similar plea for religious liberty in his, 'On Heretics and those who burn them'; see *Classics of the Radical Reformation* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1973).

²⁹ Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*.

and in service to others.³⁰ Others have emphasised the central place of *mission* in the life and faith of baptistic communities.³¹

All of these five hallmarks, McClendon remarks, are useful indicators of baptistic identity. Yet they lack an inclusive underlying vision that is able to unite all of these various strands of baptistic identity. McClendon thus develops the notion of the baptist vision as an ‘organising principle’ that brings together these diverse aspects.³² The baptist vision exhibits a radical ‘awareness of the biblical story as our story … of mission as responsibility for costly witness, of liberty as the freedom to obey God without state help or hindrance, of discipleship as life transformed into obedience to Jesus’ lordship, and of community as daily sharing in the vision’.³³ The baptist vision constitutes a hermeneutical principle, which consists in a ‘shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community’.³⁴

It has been claimed that the baptist vision creates a hospitable climate for ecumenical discussion. Yet how exactly is the vision able to accommodate such a wide variety of theological convictions? This is achieved through the implicit epistemology that underlies the baptist vision, which can be termed ‘convictional perspectivism’.³⁵ Bulgarian Baptist theologian, Parush R. Parushev, has written extensively on the use of convictional perspectivism as a hermeneutical principle that arises organically from the baptistic vision of the church.³⁶ If the task of developing a common ecumenical language, as theologians now recognise, is primarily a hermeneutical task,³⁷ it follows that an inclusive hermeneutic

³⁰ McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 28.

³¹ McClendon himself comes close to articulating this conviction in the final volume of his *Systematic Theology* trilogy, entitled, *Witness*. On the imperative of mission from a baptistic perspective, see Parush R. Parushev, ‘Witness, Worship and Presence: On the Integrity of Mission in Contemporary Europe’, *Mission Studies (Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies)*, 24, No. 2 (2007), pp. 305-332.

³² McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 32.

³³ Ibid., p. 33.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁵ The fullest elucidation of the philosophical grounds of convictional perspectivism is to be found in an early work that McClendon coauthored with the philosopher James M. Smith, entitled, *Understanding Religious Convictions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975). This work was revised and expanded and republished in 2002 under the title *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

³⁶ P.R. Parushev, ‘Convictional Perspectivism: A Constructive Proposal for a Theological Response to Postmodern Conditions’, in John Corrie and Cathy Ross (eds.), *Mission in Context: Explorations inspired by Andrew Kirk* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 111-124; see also, Parushev, ‘Baptistic Convictional Hermeneutics’, in Dare and Woodman (eds.), *The Plainly Revealed Word of God?*, pp. 172-190.

³⁷ H.G. Stobbe, *Hermeneutik – ein ökumenisches Problem* (Benziger: Zürich-Köln, 1981); Anne-Marie Meyer, *Sprache der Einheit im Epheserbrief und in der Ökumene* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), pp. 232-233, 273-275; Wolfgang Thönissen, *Dogma und Symbol: eine ökumenische Hermeneutik* (Freiburg: Herder, 2008).

that embraces dialogue and genuine engagement could make a decisive contribution to the advancement of ecumenism in our time. Eschewing the epistemological alternatives of both hermeneutical ‘imperialism’, which asserts that ‘only the interpretation of my tradition is valid and true’, and ‘relativism’, which says that ‘anything goes, all traditions are equally valid or invalid’, convictional perspectivism offers an inclusive third way that avoids the negative extremes of both of these traditional approaches.

Convictional perspectivism ‘regards convictional conflict as expected, but not inevitable, fundamental but not ultimate, enduring but not inherently ineradicable’.³⁸ Perspectivism thereby provides a hermeneutical space in which competing truth claims and value judgements do not merely coexist but jostle with each other in a context of open dialogue. By recognising that church communions may clash on specific points, the perspectivist model does not capitulate to the ‘anything goes’ approach of pluralism but recognises that some arguments, traditions and practices may be more valid than others. These judgements about the validity of competing claims are made, not imperialistically by larger partners in the dialogue that wield the most power, but through a careful process of communal and inter-communal discernment.³⁹

The perspectivist approach of the baptist vision thus recognises the possibility of meaningful inter-denominational encounters in such a way as to leave room not merely for dialogue and negotiation but also for persuasion and correction in the light of constructive criticism. In contrast to pluralism, perspectivism does not preclude the possibility that judgements can be made that certain types of ecclesial expression are more ‘true’ or ‘right’ than others, but it does refute the notion that such truth could ever become the exclusive possession of one tradition. Another way of understanding convictional perspectivism theologically is to recognise that the unavoidable fact of human sin introduces a necessary contextual pluralism into the theological task.⁴⁰

The convictional perspectivist nature of the baptist vision can accommodate a diverse range of perspectives, reaching consensus through genuine dialogue about how our faith convictions can be amended in light

³⁸ McClendon and Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, p. 9.

³⁹ This notion corresponds to some extent with Alasdair MacIntyre’s conception of the progress of traditions in his *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988). MacIntyre defines a tradition as ‘an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those, with critics and enemies external to the tradition, who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted’ (*ibid.*, p. 12).

⁴⁰ McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 35.

of the critique and correction of other dialogue partners. Such dialogue can occur without the need to make a final judgement about which perspective embodies the truth in its totality. The eschatological aspect of the baptist vision, manifested in the ‘shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community’,⁴¹ reminds us of the partial and incomplete nature of even our most cherished convictions. The ecclesiology of any church or denomination is always necessarily provisional and incomplete and baptistic ecclesiologies are no exception. Accordingly, no church tradition has a privileged status which confers upon that church the right to impose its ‘truth’ on other traditions. There is always the element of the ‘not yet’: ‘My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole’ (1 Cor. 13:12).

Although the merits of this approach in terms of its application to contemporary ecumenical dialogue may seem self-evident, it is necessary to indicate explicitly the main points of convergence between the baptist vision and the ecumenical imperative by demonstrating the theoretical point made above with illustrations drawn from Baptist faith and practice.

III. Baptists and the Ecumenical Movement

The kind of convictional perspectivism advocated in the previous section is implicitly acknowledged by the fact that ecumenical endeavours of major organisations such as the World Council of Churches are no longer directed towards the establishment of the structural unity of the church through denominational mergers into a one-world church. ‘The World Council of Churches’, notes Catholic theologian Wolfgang Thönissen, ‘does not intend to be a ‘super-church’ but rather a functional association of churches with the aim of organising common activities in areas of shared concern’.⁴² Whether or not it was ever the intention of the WCC to create a single world church through denominational mergers,⁴³ it is now asserted that this aim of creating ‘visible unity’ through a homogeneous fellowship would have been both unrealistic and undesirable.⁴⁴

⁴¹ McLendon, *Ethics*, p. 30.

⁴² Wolfgang Thönissen, *Stichwörter zur Ökumene: Ein kleines Nachschlagewerk zu den Grundbegriffen der Ökumene* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2002), p. 21 (my translation).

⁴³ The first function of the Council as approved by the Nairobi Assembly in 1975 was ‘to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe’. Yet already in 1950 the Toronto Statement of the WCC indicates that, ‘the WCC is not and must never become a super-church’.

⁴⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *The Future of Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 86.

Although it is debatable as to whether the WCC ever aimed at the establishment of the full structural unity of the church, it is undoubtedly the case that this aim has now been generally abandoned. The change in the aims of the ecumenical movement away from the attainment of structural unity towards an inclusive vision that seeks to promote greater co-operation between churches as they are involves not merely a change in strategy or procedure. It entails, moreover, an epistemological shift from an imperialistic, ‘one size fits all’ model of ecumenism towards a convictional perspectivist approach that celebrates difference and diversity. This emphasis on ‘unity in diversity’ has been set out explicitly in several official ecumenical publications, notably in a report published by the Fifth Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi in 1975. This document maintained that, ‘It is because the unity of the Church is grounded in the divine trinity that we can speak of diversity in the Church as something to be not only admitted but actively desired.’⁴⁵

Baptistic conceptions of convictional perspectivism are not to be confined to the realm of ‘mere theory’, but can in fact advance and deepen our understanding of ‘unity in diversity’. Several leading Baptists have been proactively involved in the ecumenical movement. British Baptist ecumenical activity predates even the origins of the modern ecumenical movement at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. British Baptists were active in such ecumenical organisations as the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, founded in 1732, and the Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty (f. 1811)⁴⁶ as well as the Sunday School Society (f. 1785), the British and Foreign Bible Society (f. 1804), the Evangelical Alliance (f. 1846) and the YMCA (f. 1844). British Baptists have also been very much involved in ecumenical bodies such as the British Council of Churches⁴⁷ (now Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) as well as the World Council of Churches⁴⁸ and the Congress of European Churches.⁴⁹ There remain many Baptists throughout the world today who are convinced that their participation in the ecumenical

⁴⁵ ‘Report of Section II: What Unity Requires’ (1975), in Michael Kinnamon and Brian Cope (eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Geneva: WCC, 1997), p. 111.

⁴⁶ It must be noted, however, that these organisations represented a very limited ecumenism in that they were set up in conscious opposition to the established Church and sought to bring together Christians from ‘non-conformist’ churches.

⁴⁷ The British Council of Churches was formed in 1942 in a meeting hosted at Baptist Church House in Southampton Row, London.

⁴⁸ Ernest Payne (1902–1980), a notable British Baptist ecumenist, served as a member of the Central Committee of the WCC and was Vice Chairman from 1954 to 1968 when he was elected one of its six presidents.

⁴⁹ The details of the involvement of British Baptists in these and other ecumenical organisations are listed in Anthony Cross, ‘Service to the Ecumenical Movement: The Contribution of British Baptists’, *Baptist Quarterly* 38.3 (July 1999), pp. 107–122.

movement offers the ‘opportunity for personal growth in Christ through learning from others, for enriching our spirituality through worshipping with others, and for developing [their] influence through sharing [their] own Evangelical heritage and convictions with others who are as open with us as we are with them’.⁵⁰

Despite the considerable contribution that Baptists have made to the unity of the church, there remain many Baptists throughout the world who are as vigorous in their opposition to the ecumenical movement as the advocates have been in their support of it. Whereas many Baptists maintain that active engagement in ecumenical dialogue is fully compatible with the Baptist tradition and provides a necessary defence against the otherwise provincialism and sectarianism to which baptistic communities are allegedly prone, others fear that such participation constitutes a grievous compromise that will lead to a diminishing of the distinctiveness of Baptist witness. The anti-ecumenical sentiment of some Baptists is often manifested in the fear that the ecumenical movement is paving the way towards a syncretistic liberal church, which subordinates the truth of the gospel to the claims of unity. Some Baptists take this critique even further and claim that the ecumenical movement is acting as the handmaid of the Antichrist by creating a united but apostate church that will usher in the end times tribulation. Anti-ecumenical attitudes have found their most persistent and vociferous expression in North America, particularly among the Southern Baptist Convention in America.⁵¹ Baptist communities in Northern Ireland tend to be similarly set against the ecumenical movement and sometimes this sentiment is combined with anti-Catholicism.

For those who oppose the ecumenical movement, one of the major stumbling blocks has thus been the apparent discord between ecumenical endeavours towards structural cohesion and spiritual unity on the one hand, and baptistic convictions concerning the autonomy of the local congregation on the other. Baptists are instinctively suspicious of general

⁵⁰ Douglas McBain, ‘Worthy of Trust’, in M. Bochenksi (ed.), *Evangelicals and Ecumenism – When Baptists Disagree* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1993), p. 26.

⁵¹ See, for instance, James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), p. 593. There were, however, notable exceptions, particularly among the black churches of the SBC, which generally tended to exhibit more openness towards ecumenical cooperation. Moreover, according to E. Luther Copeland, the Southern Baptist Convention in the nineteenth century was ‘generally favourable to other Christians’. See E.L. Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgment of History: The Taint of an Original Sin* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), p. 70. Moreover, Baptist evangelicals in America tend to be reluctant to work with other churches except when such cooperation (notably with conservative Catholics) offers the opportunity of augmenting the political agenda of the evangelical right on such issues as abortion and gay marriage. Michele Dillon, ‘The American Abortion Debate: Culture War or Normal Discourse?’, in James L. Nolan (ed.), *The American Culture Wars: Current Contests and Future Prospects* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1996), pp. 125-126.

impositions of legislation onto local congregations by central organisations, whether these be ecclesial or civil authorities. The centralisation of ecclesiastical power is antithetical to baptistic convictions concerning the autonomy of the local congregation. In keeping with the baptistic adherence to the freedom of conscience and the conviction that every believer is a priest before God with the competence to live out his or her priestly function of witnessing to Christ in the world, each baptistic community is free to find the mind of Christ for itself. The autonomy of the local church has been guarded jealously by baptistic communities and is present in the earliest confessional statements of baptistic communities. The 1644 *London Confession* regarded each local church as ‘a compact and knit citie in itself’.⁵²

Yet this principle of autonomy should not preclude dialogue with other ecclesial traditions. The kinds of anti-ecumenical arguments that are based on the notion of the autonomy of the local church are usually predicated at a deeper level on a misunderstanding of the relation of interdependency between the local congregation and the universal church, holy, catholic and apostolic. In the *London Confession*, the strong defence of the autonomy of the local congregation is qualified by an equally assertive insistence on the interdependence of the local congregations and the universal church: ‘though we be distinct in respect of our particular bodies, for conveniency sake, being as many as can well meete together in one place, yet are all one in Communion, holding Jesus Christ to be our head and Lord; under whose government wee desire alone to walk...’.⁵³ This principle is extended to the present day in the notion that the ultimate authority is not the committee meeting of the local church itself but Christ who is said to be present in the meeting. A 1998 report on *Relating and Resourcing* by the Doctrine and Worship Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, declared that, ‘It follows from a biblical understanding of the Church as covenant, fellowship and body that there is also no option about local churches being part of a wider fellowship of churches. They are gathered together by Christ.’ This understanding of church interdependence

⁵² *London Confession* (1644), Article XLVII, in William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), pp. 168-169. For this reason, as Professor J.H.Y. Briggs pointed out to me, Baptist membership of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) and the BWA has posed many of the same problems associated with baptistic involvement in the WCC. The BUGB has sought to behave congregationally in terms of its ecumenical involvement. Thus its responses to ecumenical initiatives have tended to be written at the local level. Moreover, membership of ecumenical organisations in the United Kingdom embraced the possibility of local congregational opt-out in terms of a list of churches not wishing to identify with the Union’s membership. In more recent times, however, things have moved on and now Pentecostal and black churches are increasingly willing to participate ecumenically where an evangelical presence has been more visible.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 168-169.

is fully in line with the teaching of Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:24. Likewise, the same report maintained that, ‘The local church may be competent, but it is scarcely omnicompetent … no local church is complete of itself and does well to seek for that of Christ which is expressed in the wider body … To fulfil the mission of Christ, churches have to do it together that they may make up for each other’s lacks and set forth the whole Christ.’⁵⁴ Thus, as Paul Fiddes rightly remarks, ‘It is precisely because of their convictions about the place of the local church meeting, and the freedom of the local church … that should make Baptists very open to listening to others.’⁵⁵

This baptistic conception of the subtle interplay of the independence and interdependence of ecclesial communities bears very emphatically upon one of the main current tensions in ecumenical dialogue: the question of ecclesial viability, which asks what kind of Christian community belongs to or does not belong to the universal church, holy, catholic and apostolic. In his report to the 2003 plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Walter Kasper noted that the central ecumenical problem that beset the cause of church unity was the ‘internal fragmentation of an Ecclesial Communion’ stemming from ‘diverse ecclesiologies’.⁵⁶ The diversity of ecclesiology becomes an obstacle to ecumenical endeavours only when particular communities maintain an exclusivist position which recognises only in its own tradition the notion of a legitimate ‘church’. A report on the WCC and the Orthodox Church highlighted two basic types of ecclesiology – the exclusivist and the pluralist. The first position is represented by the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox with their reluctance to admit churchly legitimacy outside their own communion. Moreover, there are undoubtedly some protestant groups, as well as some Baptists, who demonstrate a similar exclusivity.

The Baptist community, which has always been diverse and dispersed, provides a new perspective on how this apparent problem identified by Kasper might be resolved. The baptist tradition confronts the ecumenical movement with the basic question of what we mean by ecumenism: what kind of ecumenism are we striving for? According to one of the leading theologians of the twentieth century, ‘The catholicity of the Church, far from being the privilege of any one see or specific centre, is realised rather in the richness and multiplicity of the local traditions which

⁵⁴ Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Relating and Resourcing*, 2:7, (Didcot: BUGB, 1998), p. 4.

⁵⁵ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 211.

⁵⁶ Walter Kasper, *Introductory Report of the President to the 2003 Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*, IV. 1 (Rome: Vatican, 2003).

bear witness unanimously to a single truth.⁵⁷ This quotation comes not from a Baptist, but from the renowned Orthodox theologian, Vladimir Lossky. Baptists can likewise affirm the catholicity of the Church on the understanding that this catholicity belongs not to a particular denomination (not even to the tradition that calls itself the ‘Catholic Church’) but consists rather in the diversity of local congregations, each of which bears a united witness to the truth of Christ. Rather than being the embodiment of the kingdom of God, the church is the servant of this kingdom. Under the influence of Augustine, many Christians have tended to equate the church with the Kingdom of God. However, as Parushev notes, the overwhelming evidence of the New Testament demonstrates that, ‘Jesus was more concerned with the enactment of the coming of the kingdom, rather than the establishment of the institution of a church.’⁵⁸ In order to fulfil its eschatological vocation, the church must direct all its endeavours towards realising the purposes of the kingdom of God. The unity of the church is thus to be achieved not as an end in itself, but because a united church is better able to realise the kingdom imperative of expressing ‘the passionate and compassionate demand for the transformation of the very fabric of human behaviour’.⁵⁹

The possibility of coherence between the diversity of ecclesial expression and commonality of witness to Christ is expressed in the understanding of the term *koinonia*, as formulated in a document published by the World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993:

The terms *koinonia* and communion have a wide reference. *Koinonia* is used to refer to the life of the Trinity or to that gift God offers in all its fullness to the whole of humanity and creation. They refer to the Church of Jesus Christ and to the way in which Christian communions understand their own life experienced at a local, national or worldwide level.⁶⁰

This nebulous term *koinonia* is recognised by the contemporary ecumenical movement as the goal of inter-church dialogue. In answer to the question of what *koinonia* means, the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches gave the following answer. *Koinonia*, according to the report of the Council, is ‘expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one Eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which

⁵⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius (London: James Clarke, 1957), p. 16.

⁵⁸ Parush R. Parushev, in John H.Y. Briggs et al (eds.), *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought* (Milton Keynes/Colorado Springs/Hyderabad: Paternoster, 2009), p. 289.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 289.

⁶⁰ ‘Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness’, quoted in Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 195.

members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled.' The document continued, noting that, 'The goal of the search for full communion is realised when all the churches are able to recognise in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness.'⁶¹

According to this conception of *koinonia* a fitting epistemological approach to facilitating the inclusivity of ecumenical dialogue is the model outlined in the first part of this paper: the convictional perspectivist approach of McClendon and others. The question of exactly how this approach could be applied transformatively to contemporary ecumenism will be the focus of the next part.

IV. The Transformative Application of the Baptist Vision to Contemporary Ecumenical Dialogue

The question of which models of ecumenical dialogue can best serve the unity of the church is an immensely subtle and complex issue and each generation discusses it in its own unique manner. Our postmodern age seems to be dominated by a radical quest for tolerance and respect for the 'otherness' of traditions and worldviews that we either do not know or do not understand. The promise of the baptist vision is that it creates an auspicious hermeneutical space in which these traditions can confront one another in an open forum of a dialogue among equals. This approach enables us to respect those of other church traditions that we do not understand and to recognise the integrity of the motivation of those who represent these diverse traditions. In a volatile world, which exhibits a fear of rising international terrorism and the growth of extremist nationalist ideologies and racial intolerance, this kind of hermeneutic of respect may represent the highest kind of ecumenical wisdom.

The respect for otherness that arises out of the baptist vision derives partly from the eschatological *telos* that provides the theological substrate of the vision. The baptist vision, as identified in part one, maintains a 'shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community'.⁶² In other words, the vision operates through the understanding that 'the church now is the primitive church and the church on the judgment day'.⁶³ Based on this understanding of the eschatological continuity of the present church and the primitive church, the baptist vision acknowledges that there are several different (yet

⁶¹ 'The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling', in Kinnaman and Cope (eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement*, p. 124.

⁶² McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 30.

⁶³ Ibid.

complementary) ways of participating in and thinking about the Christian faith. There are many different ways of following the crucified and risen Christ today and of living out our common eschatological vocation. The focus of the vision on eschatology as God's last word on human accomplishment and endeavour, serves to radically relativise the truth claims that we make on behalf of our respective denominations and church traditions. This eschatological perspective also enables us to see the role of the church in its true light. The church is not to be equated with the kingdom of God. The church must participate in the redemption of life at every level. The vision of redemption, expressed in the reality of the kingdom of God, which is 'now at hand', involves a wholesale transformation that embraces all of creation.⁶⁴

The eschatological orientation of the vision does not merely exercise the negative function of relativising our value judgements; it also offers a positive criterion against which to judge the faithfulness of our ecumenical endeavours which must be judged in the light of the culmination of the biblical narrative to which each ecclesial group in its own particular way, bears collective witness. This narrative is neatly summarised by the New Testament scholar Richard Hays:

The God of Israel, the creator of the world, has acted (astoundingly) to rescue a lost and broken world through the death and resurrection of Jesus; the full scope of that rescue is not yet apparent, but God has created a community of witnesses to this good news, the church. While awaiting the grand conclusion of the story, the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is called to reenact the loving obedience of Jesus Christ and thus to serve as a sign of God's redemptive purposes for the world.⁶⁵

The crucial test of faithfulness to this narrative is not whether our tradition or church background is Catholic, Protestant or Baptist, but whether our embodied life as the pilgrim people of God conforms to the eschatological vision of salvation and reconciliation which enjoins upon ecumenical partners the obligation to work creatively towards its realisation through the love and humility required of those who claim to follow the example of Christ. Common allegiance to this narrative should therefore surmount traditional points of disagreement between Baptists and other churches in relation to such issues as baptism, local autonomy, episcopacy, communion, creeds, confessions and church-state relations.

⁶⁴ Parushev, in Briggs, *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought*, pp. 287-290.

⁶⁵ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 193.

According to this inclusive understanding, the word ‘baptist’ in the term ‘baptist vision’ refers not primarily to a denomination but to a way of living out a theology of baptism, eucharist and ministry within the one church, holy, catholic and apostolic. The ecumenicity of the baptist vision consists in its essentially trans-denominational nature and scope. The baptist vision can be expressed by any church that identifies itself as participating in the shared eschatological narrative that involves ‘yoking God and humankind as co-partners in redemption’,⁶⁶ and which culminates in the coming of the kingdom of God in all its fullness. The question of how this is attained will be answered differently by different groups of Christians. This idea was born out explicitly in a document entitled, ‘Towards Unity in Tension’, published in 1974 by the World Council of Churches’ Commission on Faith and Order, which drew on the eschatological metaphor of the kingdom of God to contend that in the struggle for church unity there will always be ‘an enduring tension which will not be resolved until the promise is fulfilled of a new heaven and a new earth. Until that day we have to accept the fact that we do not fully know how to embody in the life of the nations and communities of our time the unity which God wills.’⁶⁷

The baptist vision thus affirms that diversity should be considered not as a hindrance to unity or a cause of division, but rather as a necessary and enriching aspect of ecumenical dialogue that is required to make the kingdom of God a reality in the world today. Such diversity is not a necessary evil to be tolerated and endured but a vital requirement towards the advancement of the kingdom on earth. The kingdom of God is not a monochrome print or a one-dimensional entity that can be claimed as the exclusive possession of any one tradition or denomination. On the contrary, the anticipated kingdom is multifaceted and varied: its full realisation requires the participation of churches that are as wide and diverse as the kingdom itself. The baptist vision is a useful facilitator of ecumenical dialogue because it insists on the generous acceptance of ecumenical partners in their ‘otherness’,⁶⁸ and reminds us of the cardinal truths of ecumenism: namely that difference is not a synonym for deviance and neither is diversity a synonym for disunity.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Michael Goldberg, cited by Parushev in Briggs, *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought*, p. 288.

⁶⁷ ‘Towards Unity in Tension’, in Kinnaman and Cope (eds.), *Ecumenical Movement*, p. 109.

⁶⁸ This idea is reminiscent of Jürgen Moltmann’s insistence on the need for the church to become a united fellowship of the ‘unlike’. See Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 182-189.

⁶⁹ Thönissen, *Stichwörter zur Ökumene*, pp. 86-87.

V. Conclusion

It has been claimed that, ‘The degree to which Baptists have been involved within the ecumenical movement at all levels has been frequently underestimated, often misrepresented or just simply unknown.’⁷⁰ The implicit argument of this article has been that such misrepresentation and ignorance has worked to the detriment of the life and vitality of the ecumenical movement. The ecumenical movement requires the Baptists and any kind of ecumenical vision that does not include Baptist participation cannot in fact call itself ‘ecumenical’ in its full sense.

Seeking to dispel misunderstandings concerning baptistic ecumenical engagement, this paper has made a consistent case that the baptistic vision of the church can be applied to ecumenical dialogue in transformative ways that help contemporary ecumenism to deepen not merely its knowledge of but also its sense of participation in the vision of unity in diversity. In light of this claim, one of the foremost tasks imposed upon the ecumenical movement today is to lead the churches in the process of developing a generous and inclusive ecumenical vision which is capable of refracting the diverse spectrum of ecclesial traditions into a single beam of common witness to the truth of Christ.

It is now freely acknowledged even by Catholic theologians that, ‘the goal of ecumenism is a unity in diversity, for only such a conception of unity corresponds to the Trinitarian nature of God, which should be reflected in the structures of the church in the world today’.⁷¹ The baptistic conception of convictional perspectivism provides not only a strategy for accommodating a unity of witness in a diversity of ecclesial expression, but also answers Jürgen Moltmann’s challenge for the church to become a community that breaks down the barriers of race and gender through the ‘recognition of the other in his otherness, the recognition which makes it possible for them to be there for one another in fellowship’.⁷² Even more importantly the baptistic vision may be a way of responding to Jesus’ plea that his church may be one, ‘that the world may believe’ (John 17:21). Moreover, the eschatological undercurrent of the baptist vision lends a powerful stimulus to the unity of the church. The kind of ecumenical dialogue envisaged by the convictional perspectivist hermeneutic of the baptist vision is not a culmination leading to a structural merger or a fixed

⁷⁰ Anthony R. Cross, ‘Service to the Ecumenical Movement: The Contribution of British Baptists’, in *Baptist* 38.3 (1999), p. 107.

⁷¹ Johannes Oeldemann, *Einheit der Christen: Wunsch oder Wirklichkeit? Kleine Einführung in die Ökumene* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2009), p. 183 (my translation).

⁷² Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit*, p. 189.

synthesis of stale consensus about which church tradition was ‘right’ all along. Rather the kind of dialogue exhibits more of a humble sense of a shared journey towards the horizon of an indefinite eschatological dawn.

It may be contended that the elucidation of the baptist vision provided in this paper constitutes more a set of claims than a proof or logical argument. Yet in the final reckoning the baptist vision can only be proved ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ by being tested in real contexts of ecumenical discussion. The general viability of an ecumenical vision consists in the potential for it to be hermeneutically reappropriated to a contemporary context in such a way as to provide a framework for understanding the unity and diversity of the church. On this criterion, McClendon’s baptist vision has much to commend it. It is my sincere hope that this article contains within it some important markers that point the way towards a broad and enriching understanding of how the unity of the church’s common witness to Christ can harmonise with the diversity of the various ecclesial traditions, which together constitute the body of Christ.

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The Eucharistic Mystery: The Meeting of Pneumatology and Ecclesiology¹

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This article aims to investigate the relationship between Ecclesiology and Pneumatology by analysing the celebration of the Eucharist² in Russian Pentecostalism using a historical-comparative approach. It attempts to discover the Pentecostal approaches to the interpretation of the New Testament texts that have been developed in different cultural contexts and their influence on Pentecostal memory and identity formation.

Let me start with my personal story (following the Pentecostal pattern): as far as I know there are eight bloodstreams in my veins, and the history of three main streams of Christianity: German Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox. I was brought up in a Lutheran tradition. My grandfather on my mother's side was Prof. (of Geophysics) Richard Zimmermann, one of the founders of the first University in Central Asia, in Tashkent. He was the son of the pastor and was brought up in Baku, now in Azerbaijan, where his father ministered to the Lutheran community. During the time when the Lutheran church was destroyed and ceased to exist (the ministers and many church members lost their lives in prisons and GULAGs) my grandfather always fulfilled the role of pastor to many of his extended family. Throughout my childhood and since, I have heard many family stories – stories about the Lord's provision for His children, about miracles and about tests of Christian faith. It was possible for the persecuted minority to form a kind of Christian inner circle within the family scattered all over the country. The central annual event for us was the 'Abendmal' (Germ. – communion service or Eucharist). It was quite natural that after my grandfather's death, seeking Holy Communion which meant so much for me, I found myself in the underground Pentecostal church, the so-called 'forest brotherhood'.

Severely persecuted at that time, the underground Pentecostal church saw its main goal, not in the development of theological doctrines, but

¹ This paper was originally presented on 4 November 2011 at the EPCRA (European Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Association) conference on 'Church and Spirit' that was held in collaboration with the Faculty of Theology of the Latvian University (Riga, Latvia).

² Taken from a Greek word *εὐχαριστία* meaning 'thanksgiving' εὐ – to do/be well, good, kind and χάρις – graciousness, favour, grace, gracious care of help, goodwill. *Eucharist* designates Holy Communion, the central act of Christian worship. The word came into use very early, as exemplified by its use in the writings of the apostles (*Didache* 9:1) and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (Ign. Phil. 4:1, about 107 AD).

rather in pursuing a life of practical holiness that was the only way to be strengthened and protected by God. It was much more with teaching on holiness and on the development of personal experiential relationships with the Almighty, and on seeking His will for everything rather than with the formulation of general credal statements that the leadership was concerned. And the central event of the intensive spiritual life of the church was the Lord's Supper or the communion service that was conducted monthly.

Brought up in the Lutheran tradition I was shocked by the footwashing ceremony when I had to take part in it for the first time (remember that I was a professional microbiologist and biochemist!). This was a regular practice and a vital part of the communion service of the Russian Pentecostals that took place before the breaking of bread. Keeping in memory the communion service conducted by my grandfather, and especially after reading the book 'Selected Letters from the Correspondence between Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam' in 1987, I turned to the church leaders with the following questions: Why is our communion service closer to the Orthodox one than to the Lutheran/Protestant one? What is the Pentecostal doctrine of the Eucharist? The answer I got was honest and sincere: We do not know. Russian Pentecostals were used to a literal interpretation of Scripture; for them the Lord's Supper had never been merely a memorial service, but rather it had been a true mystery (the mystery of faith!). Various spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophetic utterances and visions were in operation and were the norm at the Eucharist service. At the same time Russian Pentecostalism was formed in the cultural context of Orthodoxy and was greatly influenced by it. Even without a properly developed doctrine the church conducted the Eucharist in the fear of God and depended greatly on a literal Scripture interpretation and on prophetic utterances (that had to be tested before being accepted). This is what the Lord told me in 1993 during the Eucharist service:

This is my death – the cup of My blood, but your death to the world is in it and your life for Me. That is why, My child, I left it, because there is strength/power in it, the power of My blood, My new covenant. In My life there is My strength/power, My healing, My joy and My peace!

The meaning of Eucharist for the traditional Pentecostal church is evidenced by special collections of hymns, namely *For the Breaking of Bread*, entirely devoted to the Communion service. Several of them are based on the Scripture quotation (Matt 26:26-29) and its interpretations, one is entirely dedicated to the footwashing ceremony, the rest are mostly about Christ's suffering and death, the cleansing power of His blood, or the unity of the disciples with the Trinity through the Eucharist. One of the

favourites was the famous hymn: *There is power in the blood* by Lewis E. Jones.

Definition of the terms

After this brief introduction may I turn your attention to the main concept of the Eucharist and the definition of terms. According to the American Pentecostal scholar James Beaty,³ ‘the Lord’s Supper is an ordinance of the Church which means it is (1) a ceremonial act (2) instituted by Christ and (3) given to His people/His body, the church’.⁴ *Ordinance* (from Lat. *ordinans* – ‘arranging’) is defined by the Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms⁵ as a religious rite, similar to a ‘sacrament’, engaged in as a memorial act of obedience rather than as having sacramental efficacy. Neither *ordinance* nor *sacrament*⁶ appears in the English Bible and for the Western/Latin Christian world the use of the term *sacrament* by the church was not very precise till it was defined by Augustine as *the visible sign of an invisible grace*.⁷

The Russian Bible goes back to the translation of the Holy Scripture into the Slavonic language by the two Greek monks, the brothers Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century. Cyril, also known as Constantine, was a humanist scholar, known to his contemporaries as Constantine the Philosopher. It was the time of the First Byzantine Renaissance and of the rediscovery of the ancient texts.⁸ Photius, the patriarch of Constantinople initiated Byzantium’s greatest cultural triumph, the conversion of the Slavs to Orthodox Christianity. In order to have worship services in the Slavonic language, Cyril and Methodius first had to create a script for the Old Church Slavonic language; only after that could they translate liturgical books into Slavonic. Cyril expanded the Slavonic language with Greek loanwords, *calques* (loan translations), and phraseology.⁹ It is obvious that

³ James M. Beaty, Ph.D. – Professor of New Testament at the COG Theological Seminary, Cleveland, TN.

⁴ J.M. Beaty in David L. Franklin and James M. Beaty (eds.), *A Theology of Holy Communion. Handouts for ‘Sacraments in the Early Church’* (Cleveland, TN: COG School of Theology, 1999).

⁵ D.K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1996), p. 196.

⁶ Lat. *sacramentum*, Gr. *mysterion*. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁷ The ‘outward visible sign’ definition is attributed to the catechism from the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and was derived from Augustine of Hippo’s work *De Catechizandis Rudibus*.

⁸ The pagan classics again began to be copied, stimulated by the importation of paper from the Arabs. The other impetus came from the development of cursive or minuscule script which rapidly replaced the capital letters employed by earlier copyists. See: C. Wells, *Sailing from Byzantium. How a Lost Empire Shaped the World* (New York: A Division of Random Dell, Inc. 2007), pp. 184–185.

⁹ The brothers started by translating the Book of Psalms, then the books of the New Testament. After Cyril’s death Methodius and his disciples continued the work, finishing the New Testament and almost the entire Old Testament.

the first Slavonic translation had been changing constantly during the following centuries (mostly due to continuous corrections made according to different Greek manuscripts), but we are grateful that the foundational translation was done by those for whom Greek was their mother tongue and who spoke Slavonic fluently (as was common for Thessalonians).¹⁰ In the Russian language the word for sacrament is ‘ТАИНСТВО’ that derives from the word ‘mystery/secret’ – *μυστήριον* (1 Tim 3:9 – *the mystery of faith*).¹¹ It reminds us of hidden things or secrets that have their hidden purpose and are beyond our understanding in their fullness while here in this world, but that will be revealed in the world to come. To express the hidden purpose or mystery of our faith we need signs or symbols and symbolic actions. A sign or a symbol¹² is something such as an object, picture, written word, or particular mark that represents something else by association, resemblance or convention. It does not produce that other reality, which is independent of and not caused by the sign. In Orthodox usage, however, a *symbol* does not merely stand for something else, as does a ‘sign’; it indicates the actual presence of its subjects.¹³

Communion is the other frequently used term for the Lord’s Supper. The word *communion* comes from the Latin *communis* (adjective), meaning *common* or *shared* and *communio* (noun), meaning *mutual participation*. When we partake of the Holy Communion, we are acknowledging our dependence on the Lord. This is true both in the natural realm and in the spiritual. He is our strength. We share in His mission in the world and He shares His wisdom, guidance and strength with us, so that we may participate in His mission. The Sacrament of the Table functions very much as a renewal of the covenant. The new commandment of Christ at the Last Supper is to love one another as He loved us. This is to love as Christ loved us, which is, of course, possible only with Christ within and with the help of His Holy Spirit. Over the centuries in the Early Church the people of God have come to greet each other with the kiss of peace – this was a common practice of the Russian Pentecostal communities and still is in

¹⁰ The empire’s second city had been surrounded by Slavic settlers and this was the reason why the Slavonic language was heard in Thessalonica as often as Byzantine Greek. Wells, *Sailing from Byzantium*, p. 187.

¹¹ The ways of God, especially God’s plan for salvation, which cannot be known with the rational, finite human mind, but can be experienced only by the revelation of God. The Orthodox Church also uses the term *mystery* for the sacraments of the Church. See: *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 803.

¹² From Greek verb *συμβάλλω*, some of whose meanings are ‘unite, compare’. As an ideal construction, symbol keeps in itself in a hidden form all possible manifestations of an object and creates a perspective for its endless unfolding (A. Losev). See: *Философская Энциклопедия*, (M.: Советская Энциклопедия, 1970), p. 10. Philosophical Encyclopedia (in Russian).

¹³ As an example of such understanding the *Orthodox Study Bible* gives the dove as the symbol which brought to Jesus the descent of the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:13-16). See: *The Orthodox Study Bible*, p. 808.

some conservative Pentecostal circles. The words ‘The Peace of the Lord be with you’ are still the typical greeting in the evangelical milieu all over Russia.

Ecclesiology

It is through the sacraments and in the communion of the church that divine grace comes to each of us through Jesus Christ,¹⁴ or as it was well put by Jürgen Moltmann (b.1926): there is no *Eucharist* without *charis*.¹⁵ *Sacraments* are the earliest liturgical practices of the churches. However, while the doctrine of the means of grace developed very rapidly, the doctrine of grace itself (as justification, forgiveness, sanctification, etc.) developed slowly and unsteadily. Historically, the relation between the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of the means of grace has been ambiguous.¹⁶ Moltmann, who was named as the outstanding theologian of the twentieth century, defines three paradigms for the Church in modern society as follows: the *hierarchical church* of God the Father (it was the hierarchy of the Graeco-Roman world and is still seen in Roman Catholicism and in Orthodoxy), the Christocentric *brotherly church* of God the Son (the Protestant and evangelical churches) and the *charismatic church* of God the Spirit (to which belong many congregations and churches that perceived, experienced and practiced the charismatic fellowship of the Holy Spirit).¹⁷ It is a fact that the Pentecostal movement has become the second largest group in Christendom (due to its growth worldwide, especially in Latin America, Africa and Asia).

A typical understanding of the Eucharist in American Pentecostalism may be found in *Living the Faith* – Church of God’s text-book produced by the School of Theology (Cleveland, TN) analysing a sample listing of the means of grace:

... preaching, teaching, water baptism, footwashing, the Lord’s Supper, worship, gathering together, submission one to another, speaking the truth in love, speaking ourselves in psalms and hymns in the Holy Spirit, Scripture reading, prayer, and works of mercy and kindness to others.¹⁸

¹⁴ According to Augustine the person who partakes of communion becomes a partaker of the body and blood of Christ by the eating of bread and wine. See: J.L. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought, Vol.II. From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), p. 53.

¹⁵ J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life. A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1994), p. 298.

¹⁶ J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine. 1. The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1975), p. 155.

¹⁷ J. Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, arise! God’s Future for Humanity and the Earth* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 20-27.

¹⁸ *Living the Faith* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God School of Ministry, 2001), p. 281.

What becomes obvious from this list is that the Lord's Supper does not have a central place in comparison with the Russian Pentecostal tradition. Instead the list emphasises the importance of coming together (a communal experience or ecclesiology) for preaching or teaching, for footwashing, etc.

A similar view can be found in the writings of contemporary Orthodox authors. According to Metropolitan Zizioulas (b.1931), the Eucharist is an icon/image of the Kingdom of God that is yet to come and that is already here on earth.¹⁹ This famous contemporary Orthodox theologian is emphasising the difference between the Western tradition which connects the Eucharist with Calvary (following Anselm of Canterbury's theology with its climax in the sacrifice of Christ as a satisfaction for sin – *Cur Deus homo*)²⁰ and the Eastern one which connects the Eucharist with the Kingdom of God.

Pentecostals see the Kingdom of God and the message of its breaking in (through the gospel ministry of words, power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit) as their goal and passion. Land defines Pentecostals as a goal-oriented community on the way to the Kingdom.²¹ Thus we see how close Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism are coming together in their ecclesiology – the Kingdom of God is viewed by both traditions as the climax of the whole salvation history. The tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' in the Kingdom of God, well realised by Pentecostals is analysed by Zizioulas in his exegesis of the Lord's Prayer:

... *Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*
Give us this day our daily bread... (Matt 6: 10-11)

Following the well-rooted tradition of the early Church Fathers regarding the interpretation of the expression *daily bread*,²² he is pointing out that it indicates not merely bread for this day, taken for the sustenance of physical life; it is bread for the eternal day of the Kingdom of God, for the

¹⁹ J. Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamus, 'The Eucharist and the Kingdom of God' in G. Rhea Homer (ed.), *Church and Eucharist*. Transl. from Greek by Hieromonk Leontias (Kozlov) (Bogoroditze-Sergiev Pustin, 2009), pp. 203-298.

²⁰ See: J.L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought. Vol. II. From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), pp. 163-165.

²¹ S. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality. A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1977), p. 174.

²² Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (died 258), Cyril of Jerusalem (ca.313-386) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430) are among the selected authors quoted in the well-known work 'The Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer by the Words of the Holy Fathers' of Bishop Theophan (Theophan the Recluse, 1815-1894). See: Епископ Феофан. *Истолкование молитвы Господней словами Святых Отцов*, (Изд-е Австралийско-Новозеландской Епархии Русской Православной Церкви Заграницей, 1990), p.161. Bishop Theophan, *Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer through the Words of the Holy Fathers* (in Russian).

sustenance of our eternal life. This bread, prepared by God in the beginning for the immortal element of our nature, is the bread of Life which will triumph over the death brought by sin. Jesus commands us to seek first the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:33). Thus the Lord tells us to ask not merely for material bread which keeps us in good physical health, but for spiritual bread which gives us life – the Living bread, Christ Himself, given in the Eucharist to those who receive Him.²³

In the persecuted Pentecostal church those who had been preparing themselves for the Communion Service did it through prayer and fasting (no water, no food), realising the breaking in of the Kingdom and longing for the festal meal that is waiting for them (Matt 26:29) at the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:7).²⁴ An essential part of the preparation was the confession of a believer/church member before the pastor or deacon, prior to the Lord's Supper. It was recommended to confess in advance, not on the day of the Eucharist service. 1 Cor 11:28-29 was taken literally and very seriously, as it is formulated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his famous 'Nachfolge', the Kingdom of Christ that is already/not yet costs a lot.²⁵ ... *My yoke is easy and My burden is light* (Matt 11:30). It was a part of the cost of discipleship, of seeking the values of the Kingdom in the secular world with its communist ideology. Such an attitude towards grace (revealed to us in the sacraments as well) was considered to be the only one appropriate. In the cultural context that was mostly defined by the Russian Orthodox Church, we realised that as Pentecostals we are taking part in the Communion Service only because through Christ and in Christ we are made holy, and at the same time we are taking part in it in order to become and to be holy (to be the salt, the light, etc.) as He is holy. It is still costly for a Christian to go against the main stream of our contemporary culture with its major values: success, safety, leadership, competition, prestige, etc.

The congregation (prepared after the individual and common confession and prayer) had been waiting in prayer for a revelation from the Lord to bless the coming Lord's Supper. Sometimes it took hours till the blessing was given (through a prophetic utterance or a vision). I remember that it happened only once that the Communion Service had to be moved to another day because not all the people (church members) had prepared

²³ Zizioulas, 'Eucharist and the Kingdom of God'.

²⁴ There is the parallel tradition in Rabbinic Judaism: the righteous ones, those who fulfil the Torah here in this world will be rewarded by the Almighty in the world to come by attending the great banquet (Vayikra/Leviticus Rabah 13,3 and Midrash Tehillim 146:4).

²⁵ The other understanding is: the preaching of forgiveness without the required repentance, baptism without church discipline, Eucharist without confession, ... or grace without discipleship, without the cross, without Jesus Christ ... Bonhoeffer defined this as a 'cheap grace'. See: Бонхёффер Д. *Хождение вслед* (М.: РГГУ, 2002), pp. 14-15. D. Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge* (in Russian).

themselves for the Eucharist. Everyone had been praying for himself or herself, asking the Lord whether it is not he or she who is not yet prepared (and needs to confess some sin committed), and for the whole church (community), that the Lord would grant His grace in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The church members were called to intercede for each other, and to pray in tongues, asking for redeeming experiences of the fellowship of Christ and liberating experiences of the Holy Spirit. That practice of the church and its self-identification as a Eucharistic fellowship had a lot in common with the British Apostolic tradition described by Black in his recent publication on Pentecostal Ecclesiology.²⁶

Being a biochemist by my first (secular) profession I understand even better than most the importance of an organic understanding of the Church (1 Cor 12:12, 27). When one member suffers (or is lacking holiness) the whole body is at risk. The same is true at the molecular level – a tiny change in the genetic code can result in a major change that is crucial for a human personality (much more important than the lack of a finger or leg, for example). This takes us back to the Old Testament and its ideology of Israel as a chosen nation, the one that has to be holy because YHWH is holy (see: Ex., Lev., Num. etc.).²⁷ God entered into a relationship with the Israelites so that they might perpetually sanctify His name. According to biblical tradition, holiness means not just ‘otherness’, or moral perfection, but physical and spiritual separation from the impure. The Eucharist reminds us that although churches are minorities in our multifaith and secular societies, we are still a worldwide community that belongs to the Kingdom of God. As an organic union (not primarily an organisation!) the church consists of members who have the same life flowing through them, the new spiritual life renewed in them by the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist.

Schmemann in his *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* expressed the Orthodox point of view: the meeting together of God’s people to worship the Lord is, in a sense, a sacrament in itself.²⁸ The very word *communion* means sharing (1 Cor 11:18-20) and that is why Schmemann defines the Liturgy as a ‘sacrament of coming together’ as a Church (John

²⁶ J. Black, ‘The Church as Eucharistic Fellowship: A British Apostolic Contribution toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology’ in *JEPTA XXIX*, N 2 (2009), pp. 78-89.

²⁷ The biblical teaching on the holiness of a human being derives from his/her becoming like God. It is understood in the Eastern tradition as a reflection and actualisation in a human being of the divine perfection. God is the one and the only source of ‘holiness’. That is why humans are able to be partakers of His ‘holiness’ only by sharing His divine essence that became possible in Christ. See: Концевич И.М. Стяжание Святого Духа в путях Древней Руси (М.: Лепта, 2002), pp. 57-58. I.M. Kontzewich (in Russian).

²⁸ A. Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), pp.11-26.

11:52).²⁹ It is in the Lord's Supper that we experience most profoundly what it means to be the church. It is His holiness that is making us holy through the grace given to us in the Eucharist, but how it is possible is a mystery. We are partaking bread and wine, following His commandment to do it regularly in faith until the Lord returns, keeping the faith – *the mystery of the faith* (1 Tim 3:9). This *mystery* of salvation in Christ was revealed *among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory* (Col 2:12) and it is considered mystical in Russian culture as is everything that is beyond our rational understanding.

Pneumatology

The community of the church is a trinitarian experience of God. Jesus' high priestly prayer was for the future church, which participates in the life and glory of the Father and the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit:

I do not pray for these alone but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that *they all may be one*, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that *they also may be one in Us*, that the world may believe that You sent Me. < ... > I in them, and You in Me; that *they may be made perfect in one*, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me (John 17:20-23).³⁰

We have to remind ourselves that it is only the Holy Spirit who reveals the mystery of our gifts of bread/the body and wine/the blood of Christ that we partake of to signify the organic union/the church. According to Metropolitan Benjamin (Fedchenkov, 1880-1961) the essence and the goal of the Eucharist is the mystical reunion of Christ with those who are partaking of the holy gifts (John 6:56).³¹ This is the reason why, in the Eastern Church, there were no discussions about the definition of the eucharistic terms discussed earlier in this presentation as there were in the Western Christian world. In Eastern Christianity all of it was embraced by the concept of mystery.³² The Eucharist is perceived as the foreshadowing

²⁹ Протоиерей Александр Шмеман. *Евхаристия. Таинство Царства* (М.: Паломник, 2007), p. 27. A. Schmemann, *Eucharist. The Sacrament of the Kingdom* (in Russian).

³⁰ *The Orthodox Study Bible. New Testament & Psalms*, New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997).

³¹ Metropolitan Benjamin (Fedchenkov), 'The Thoughts on/about the liturgy of the Faithful' in *Liturgy of the Faithful* (Moscow: The Rule of Faith, 2006), pp. 55-356.

³² Both East and West believe in the real transformation of the bread and wine in the Body and Blood of Christ in a mysterious way by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, each church developed its own approach to this mystery. The Roman Catholic Church since Thomas Aquinas speaks about *transubstantiation* (Lat. *transubstantatio* – 'change of essence'); the Eastern Church emphasizes that this is just one of the possible approaches to define what is taking place and sees in such categories and definitions of the Holy Spirit's activity a rejection of the divine mystery. See: Лич Дж. и Кросс Л. *Дух и*

of the coming Kingdom, the entrance to which is possible only through the sacrifice of Christ, through His blood shed for our sin.

In the Russian underground Pentecostal church the white cloth put on the table on which the Eucharist was served was considered ‘holy’ after placing upon it the gifts of bread and wine that had been sanctified by prayer. The literal interpretation and the awe of the moment left no room for questions or confusion. The real experience of the presence of God intensified the importance of the Eucharist in the life of the church.

Thanksgiving, prayer, adoration, praise, and the silent sinking into wonder, proceed from the energies of the Spirit, Who gives life, are directed towards the Son, and go with the Son to the Father.³³

According to Moltmann, the Kingdom of God (that is revealed to us in the Eucharist as we have just discussed) is the perfected *perichoretic*³⁴ unity of God and the world and, therefore, the final goal of the Lord’s Supper is not just reunification and fellowship with the Son of God the Saviour, but is so much more. The idea of perichoresis, or reciprocal indwelling, derives from the theology of the Greek fathers.³⁵ While in Greek patristic writings perichoresis defined the circular dynamic bond that unites the three Persons in their interaction, the Latin authors emphasised the mutual fusion and rest of the Persons united in nature. Moltmann clarifies that the Latin translation of this Greek word was first of all *circumincessio* (indicating a dynamic interpenetration – *incedere*), and later also *circumincessio* (*insedere* – an enduring, resting indwelling). The Latin words express a double sense of the Trinitarian unity: dynamics and rest, complete peace and complete turbulence at the same time.³⁶ With a grateful heart we are praising (and asking) the Lord for participation in the fellowship of the holy Trinity.

This paradigm was introduced to Russian religious philosophy by Vladimir Solovyov and others who belong to the Russian Silver Age. Sergey Bulgakov (1871-1944) developed Solovyov’s ideas, forming a doctrine of the Trinity as a perichoretic love; Lev Karsavin (1882-1952)

огонь: *Опыт введения в богословие тайнств* (Духовная библиотека, 2007), pp. 74-75. H.J. Leach and L. Cross. *Spirit and Fire: An Introduction to the Holy Mysteries* (in Russian).

³³ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, p. 298.

³⁴ From Greek *perichoresis* – ‘penetration’. A term used in the theology of the Trinity to indicate the intimate union, mutual indwelling, or mutual interpenetration of the three members of the Trinity with each other. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, p. 207.

³⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus (the Theologian, 329-389/390) was probably the first to use this concept (a movement from one another, passing round and going round) for the description of Trinity. See: Ilarion Hieromonach (Alfeyev). *The Life and the Teaching of St Gregory the Theologian* (Moscow: Lovers of Church History Society’s Press, 1998), pp. 268-269 (in Russian). Later it was made the key concept for the doctrine of Trinity by John of Damascus (676-749) who described it as ‘cleaving together’.

³⁶ Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, arise!*, pp. 152-160.

enriched the anthropological approach, borrowing from the medieval mystic and love tradition; Nikolai Berdyaev (1872-1948), with his ‘new religious consciousness’, anticipated the theology of the Crucified God and the theology of Mystical Experience, with its pneumatological language, that was later expanded by Moltmann. The contemporary Russian-American scholar Mikhail Aksenov-Meerson (b.1942), in one of his recent works, managed to bring together the traditions of the Church Fathers (from Augustine and medieval Western mysticism to neoplatonism and the Eastern Church Fathers) with German classical philosophy and the personalism of Russian religious thought by offering the Trinitarian paradigm on love.³⁷

Pneumatology has always been at the very heart of Eastern theology, and this emphasis on the Holy Spirit, typical of the theological thought of the Christian East, has sometimes led to the rejection of such ‘pneumatocentrism’ by Western theologians. In one of my recent works I mentioned that an experiential theology (such as the Pentecostal one) aims to be a category of wisdom drawn from the experience of knowing God, rather than doctrinal wisdom.³⁸ The experiential way of doing theology is related to the prayer life of a believer and is inseparable from the spirituality of a Christian. The hidden truths of the Kingdom are revealed only through the Holy Spirit. Unification with God is impossible without prayer because prayer is a personal encounter with God. The inner experiences of a person taking part in the Eucharist (including the one who is conducting the service) are described and analysed by many contemporary Orthodox authors³⁹ in continuity with the tradition of the early Church Fathers, especially the teaching of Isaac on bitter and sweet tears.⁴⁰ Deep Christian affections are at the core of Pentecostal spirituality as well and are considered to be essential for understanding theology. We do not love principles or doctrines, we love the Person! Literally, spirituality means life in God’s Spirit, and a living relationship with Him. Bitter and sweet tears, as well as joy and love, were a vital part of the transformation process going on in a Christian, which was embraced by the

³⁷ Аксенов-Меерсон (протоиерей Михаил). *Созерцанием Троицы Святой ... Парадигма Любви в русской философии троичности* (Киев: Дух и Литера, 2007), p. 328. Aksenov-Meerson (Archpriest Mikhail), *Contemplating the Holy Trinity ... A Paradigm of Love in Russian Trinitarian Philosophy* (in Russian).

³⁸ O. Zaprometova, ‘Religious Experience as a Way of Doing Theology: Challenges of the Twentieth Century’ in Mary Raber and Peter F. Penner (eds.), *History and Mission in Europe: Continuing the Conversation* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2011), pp. 399-411.

³⁹ The book of Metropolitan Benjamin on the liturgy is just one. See: Metropolitan Benjamin (Fedchenkov), ‘Thoughts about the liturgy of the Faithful’ in *Liturgy of the Faithful* (Moscow: The Rule of Faith, 2006), pp. 55-356.

⁴⁰ O. Zaprometova, ‘Experiencing the Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Reading of the Early Church Fathers. Part 2: Isaak of Nineveh and Simeon the New Theologian’ in *JEPTA* (2010) 30-1: pp. 1-19.

Eastern teaching on what is sometimes infelicitously rendered in English as *deification*.⁴¹

The development of this concept owes its most decisive progress to Paul, as was shown by the French scholar Jules Gross who has attempted to investigate New Testament roots of this doctrine that developed in a uniquely Christian form from the time of Irenaeus onward.⁴² The Pauline concept of divinisation or *theosis* (Greek: ‘making divine’) – the unification of a human being with God, the theology and mysticism of the apostle, present divinisation as the direct effect of the assimilating union with Christ, the death and resurrection of God the Saviour. According to Gregory of Nyssa, in order to permit us to partake of His body ‘raised to the divine dignity’, Christ instituted the Eucharist, by means of which He, like a seed, is put into the body of believers. By this union He makes them partakers of incorruptibility, in other words, He deifies them.⁴³ It is the union of human nature with divinity, established by the incarnation and sealed by the resurrection, that, so to speak, ‘deifies’. This union is extended to individuals through the sacraments (or hidden truths) of baptism and the Eucharist, and is made a reality by the Holy Spirit. Here we see how close Pneumatology and Ecclesiology are coming together. The new birth is given and one starts one’s pilgrimage following Christ. The Eucharist is bringing us to Christ’s ‘likeness’ and to a total unification with the Lord. According to Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), the unification of a person with Christ in the Eucharistic mystery is the highest form of divine love revealed to us.⁴⁴ There is a vibrant dynamic in the Lord’s Supper service! We are becoming one with Him in partaking the bread and wine, following His commandment – it isn’t easy to understand it fully – it is a mystery, the mystery of faith!

Conclusion

I do realise that my article has hardly achieved anything more than raising some questions and concerns related to the perception of the Eucharist by

⁴¹ From Lat. *deificatio*. Elevation to the position of a god. In early Eastern Church theologians, an image for salvation in which through Christ believers can be made like God (2 Peter 1:4). Also, divinisation.

McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, p. 73.

⁴² To share the ‘newness of life’ (Rom 6:4) or to become a ‘new creation’ (2 Cor 5:17, Eph 2:4-10) a person must be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), etc. See: J. Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers* (Anaheim: A & C Press, 2002), pp. 82-83.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 185-186.

⁴⁴ Г Мандзаридис, *Обожжение человека по учению святителя Григория Паламы* (Свято-Троицкая Сергиева Лавра, 2003), pp. 45-46. Mantzaridis Georgios I, *The Deification of Man. St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (in Russian).

contemporary Christians, and it is appealing for a more profound development of the theology of the Eucharist for Russian Pentecostals.

First, we know a lot about the Spirit, especially in the Pentecostal context, but do we know the Spirit Who is leading us into the fellowship of the Trinity? Do we realise that in Eucharist we are invited to share the Trinitarian experience? What could we offer to the contemporary, mostly secular, world seeking for new experiences in life, for something that will fill the emptiness and loneliness, for spirituality? Do we ourselves realise the richness of our spiritual heritage? (I have to admit that a lot of the treasures of Eastern Pneumatology the Lord revealed to me during my studies in the United States, which I called my American exile. Reading the Eastern Fathers as primary sources I found explanations for my own spiritual experiences! For these lessons I am really grateful.). Could we preach and teach about the concepts of *perichoresis* and *theosis* that are our common heritage?⁴⁵ Perhaps we will have to start with updating or contextualising the terminology? Pentecostals know it by experience, Orthodox believers, primarily scholars, know it from tradition, although I do recognise that there are those who truly experience the Holy Spirit in every Christian tradition. At the same time a lot of the experiences that I shared concerning the underground Pentecostal church back in the 1980s, my students, who are mostly from unbelieving families, have never experienced in the contemporary church context.

Second, ‘The Church is a gathering of all believers to whom the pure Gospel is preached and to whom the Holy Sacraments are given’ – this is the definition of the Church by the Augsburg Confession (paragraph seven). Thus this Western statement pointing as it does to the importance of the Eucharist for Ecclesiology is in accord with the Eastern one: ‘The Church is coming into view in the sacraments’ (Nikolaos Kabasilas, 1322-1392) and ‘The sacraments constitute the Church’ (Georhy Florovsky, 1893-1979).⁴⁶ The idea of the Eucharist as the Kingdom of God is in tune as well with the Pentecostal passion for the Kingdom and it is in the Eucharist where Pneumatology and Ecclesiology are coming together.

Finally – I was glad to find the same concern for spiritual experiences among contemporary Orthodox and Catholic scholars/ministers. Schmemann shared his grief when writing about his realisation of the same kind of *Eucharistic crisis* in the Church. He considers that it is the urgent need of the Church to open once again, and for every church member, the

⁴⁵ Once, I remember, I was approached by one Russian Orthodox scholar (after her acquaintance with my article on the Pentecostal reading of the Church Fathers) with a question: How do you dare to use **our** Fathers?

⁴⁶ Quoted according to Zizioulas, ‘Eucharist and the Kingdom of God’, pp. 203-298.

true meaning and the true purpose of the Eucharist as a Mystery of the Church. To realise the service of the Eucharist as the central act, in which the Church is becoming the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the gift of a New Life, the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, the knowledge of God and fellowship with Him – this is what we need.⁴⁷ The encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), once again affirmed that the Eucharist is the source, centre and climax of the life of a Christian and of the Church, and therefore, of its pastoral ministry. Cardinal Walter Kasper (b.1933) considers that we are living in the time when there is a need to re-open the meaning of the Eucharist and the Liturgy, and points to the need for liturgical education.⁴⁸

I consider theological education to be nowadays a true mission of the Church because it is developing our cultural memory, allowing us to experience the mystery of remembrance! At the same time I am really concerned about the change of the educational paradigms that are taking place in many schools and programmes. It is obvious that even within Biblical Studies and Theology our seminary curriculum is following a secular pattern and moving from a focus on God to a focus on man – more Counselling, Marriage and Family, Theology of Children, etc., anthropology and sociology, instead of Theology proper – the Doctrine of God the Holy Trinity, Christology, Soteriology and Pneumatology. While the world (not only in Russia) is seeking for *spirituality*, and the academic world is working on the spiritual values without which we (as a society) are in danger of losing our self-identity, the Church instead is trying to adapt to contemporary society. Quite often, due to loud and joyful praise and worship, we are failing to recognise the seriousness of the Eucharist in our church service.

I started my article by sharing my longing for the Eucharist. I needed it as my *daily bread*, although at that time I didn't realise the depth of its theological meaning. Our house liturgy was very simple, and we never identified it as a liturgy. Still it was the mystery of the Church, and the Holy Spirit was present among us as He was with so many God-fearers worldwide, those who were without any church building or even sometimes without bread or wine. I believe you've heard such stories (at least I have heard them).

⁴⁷ Протопресвитер Александр Шмеман. *Святая Святым* (Киев: Центр Православной Книги, 2007), p. 69, A. Schmemann, *Holy things for holy people* (in Russian).

⁴⁸ В Каспер, *Таинство единства. Евхаристия и церковь* (М.: ББИ, 2007), p. 17. *Walter Kasper. Sacrament of Unity* (in Russian).

At the EAAA⁴⁹ meetings Eurasian evangelicals expressed the urgent need for liturgical renewal. I believe the same is true within the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Russia, a renewal that will be God-centred rather than man-centred. We need to deepen our worship and to bring the Eucharist back to its proper place as a climax of the Christian life.⁵⁰

When we mention the symbolic character of the Eucharist, we have to keep in mind that all language consists of symbols that serve to help us in understanding the most difficult concepts or ideas. Symbols are challenging us to ask questions about their meaning and are a vital part of our cultural memory formation process. Let us follow the example of the Pesakh Haggadah and the important role of questions and answers for Judaism. Old symbols become reinterpreted, due perhaps to environmental changes. It was a problem for the pagan world in the first Christian era to grasp the meaning of this most important service celebrated in the catacombs during the persecution by officialdom. Later in history the concept of the Eucharist will appear at the centre of the discussion within both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, both among those who came before the Reformation and those who followed in their steps (Evangelicals and Pentecostals). Moreover, it serves always as the main disciplinary tool of the Church next to excommunication. The Eucharist is functioning, according to Lotman, as a ‘semiotic condenser’, emerging as ‘the mediator between textual synchrony and cultural memory’.⁵¹ Jan and Aleida Assmann’s theory of *communicative and cultural memory* could be applied to such a study and could serve as an example of the postmodern approach to historiography (to be compared with the traditional historical-comparative approach) with text as its main object and which presents the formation of a new way of thinking.⁵² It is possible to discover, in different Christian bodies (subcultures) and their approaches to the interpretation of the Eucharist, the patterns that might be defined as implicit (traditional) and explicit (the concepts that are in the process of formation, defined by Jan Assmann as *theological discourse*⁵³).

⁴⁹ The Eurasian Accreditation Association serves the needs of theological education for the former Soviet Union countries and celebrated its tenth anniversary in October 2011 (Kiev), <http://www.e-aaa.info>.

⁵⁰ Second Vatican Council – the liturgical renewal is a sign of the Holy Spirit’s visitation of the Church (SC 43 – p. 33).

⁵¹ Ю Лотман, Символ в системе культуры in *Статьи по семиотике культуры и искусства* (Санкт-Петербург: Академический проект 2002), pp. 211-225. Y. Lotman, ‘Symbol in the System of Culture’ in *Articles on the Semiotics of Culture and Art* (in Russian).

⁵² S. Jordan, ‘Theorien und Methoden der Geschichtswissenschaft’ (Paderborn, 2009), p. 169. J. Assmann, ‘Guilt and Remembrance. On Theologization of History in the Ancient Near East in ‘History and Memory. Studies in Representation of the Past’, 2.1. 1990, pp. 5-33.

⁵³ This term Assmann borrowed from M. Foucault. See: Ассман Я. Египет. Теология и благочестие цивилизации (М.: Присцельс, 1999), p. 244. J. Assmann, *Theologie und Weisheit im alten Ägypten* (in Russian).

The Eucharist is challenging our memory and at the same time inviting us to join the fellowship of the divine uniting into a single whole past, present and future. This is not just the ancient ritual: all parts of this experience are realities that are already granted. The Holy Trinity is gathering us together as the Church uniting the beginning with the end and giving us a new beginning in Love through the Holy Spirit. Mystery is neither rational nor logical; communion with the Holy Trinity is possible only through the Holy Spirit. This memory is helping us in the process of building our self-identity (as members of the covenanters, those who belong to the Kingdom and not to this world). The Eucharist is our reunification with the Father through the sacrifice of the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dr Olga Zaprometova, Senior Lecturer of the Eurasian Theological Seminary, Moscow, Russia

IBTS Graduation Address – 24 May 2013

Keith G Jones

Philippus de Grevia, a theologian and poet, who graduated as Magister of the University of Paris in 1206 and was later to be Chancellor of the University from 1218 to 1236, was not above complaining about his colleagues saying of them:

Everything is done hastily, little is learnt, and the time needed for study is wasted in meetings and discussions. While the elders debate in their meetings and enact statutes, the young ones organise villainous plots and plan their nocturnal attacks!¹

So, if we were cynical, we might deduce that not much has changed in Europe over 800 years of higher educational life. Of course, Philippus was not too objective a writer as he was trying to guard the oversight of the University of Paris by the ecclesial authorities in the way of the religious orders and local bishops, over against the new corporations established with special charters by Pope and Monarchs; chartered communities of scholars across various disciplines with liberty to pursue scholarship free and unfettered from the controlling hands of ecclesial dignitaries.

Whether it was Bologna or Paris which saw the beginning of the modern university (and we know the historical debates about that, though the European Union seems to have settled it for us all by choosing ‘Bologna’ as the charter name for how higher education should be shaped in Europe), we draw on this eight-hundred-year tradition of elders and young people reading, researching, writing, debating, thinking and praying and, as a community gathered now at the end of such a process, to confer on women and men the title Magister or Master, in a time-honoured fashion as a result of diligent study and satisfied examiners. Perhaps we can see three insights that Monarchs and Popes reflected on as they began creating these communities of learning across central, western and southern Europe.

Intelligibility of belief

They were looking for critical scholarship to bring order out of what some saw as the diverse and often mutually contradictory beliefs of the various religious orders and scholars and, of course, they hoped in the universities to engage in battle against the worst of heresies. Well, neither Pope nor

¹ Walter Rüegg, in Walter Rüegg (ed.), *A History of the University in Europe*, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 15ff.

Monarchs quite got what they had desired, for universities became places where scholarship burst out often to engage and undermine the very order which they had believed could be fostered and controlled by them.

Put intelligent people together and encourage them to reason and argue about faith, about law, about philosophy, about language, and all sorts of things can happen – minds are opened up, new ideas are shaped, movements begin. Universities in Oxford, Paris, Prague, San Salvador became something other than centres for exerting theological, legal and political control. They became seed-beds for revolution in every generation. At Oxford, Wycliffe wanting the Bible to be taken out of ecclesial scholarly control by translating it into English. In Prague, Hus failing to find reasons for denying the cup to all who attended the Eucharist. In Rotterdam, Erasmus eager to see the search for the very best original texts of the biblical record and then ensure that European scholars disseminated the texts in the languages of the people, thus causing young Zwingli studying in Basle and Vienna to imbibe the ideas which led to his founding of the School of the Prophets. In our own lifetime, Sobrino and friends at the University of Central America (UCCA) standing up to those nasty army generals, led by that not so good Baptist, General Ponce and his dark acts of repression.

And importantly for us, though these original communities were bastions of male life, it is unthinkable now to have such a community which, thanks to the thinking which has gone on within those communities, is not, now, open to all – women and men, physically challenged, whatever our ethnicity and nationality.

So, from Bologna, or is it Paris, to IBTS, via Oxford, Charles University, the UCCA and eight hundred years of community life in higher education, we affirm that deep truth here today. Whatever Popes and Monarchs wanted, communities of scholars – young and old and, as those first universities envisaged, not narrowly-bound by single-shaped ethnicity, but diverse, multi national multi cultural multi lingual communities – burst on the European scene to go on changing and transforming it.

Christianity is worth discussing. The intelligibility of belief, people locked in debate on what the texts mean, has the potential of changing the world. You who graduate today must never forget that.

People to get things done

There was a second intent in creating these communities of scholars: to raise up educated people to make the Empire, the nations, the ecclesiastical machine work, with people able to think, write, debate, decide. I guess,

prior to that, the monk in the religious community, the solitary person sat in the privacy of his own library or study thinking great thoughts, had been fine, but as civilisation developed, as the needs of nations and diocese developed, it was no longer adequate for a King, or Prince or Prince Bishop to conduct all their own correspondence, manage their estates, conduct the affairs of society. So, there was a need for people mentally equipped, formed with edges rubbed off them by having lived in community, used to looking with a wider perspective at the affairs of the world, to get things done. That point applies absolutely to those graduating here today. My colleagues and I have not invested time and energy and scholarship in you and with you for you to go away and spend a life of idleness, but to get things done!

W. E. Gladstone, one-time Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, had his home at Hawarden on the English-Welsh border. He was somewhat of a Christian eccentric, four times Premier, and held most of the big offices of state during his lifetime, but he left a trust fund equivalent to about five million Euros at today's prices to create what is known today as St Deiniols Residential Library. It has 250,000 volumes and people go there simple to read – you fall out of bed and into the library! Some here today have been and stayed there. I certainly could imagine using a part of my sabbatical in that way but, whilst it is fine for a sabbatical, it is ethically and morally perverse to see it as a way of life. No, those graduating with Certificate, Magister or Master in Theology have been prepared for activism – scholarship put to use in the service of Christ.

Prepared for leadership

What the Pope and Monarchs were doing was succession planning, not that they would have understood such a management-speak term. Within a few generations no-one would be a Cardinal unless they had been to a university; at the Reformation, pivotal to leadership of the renewal of the church, were the Faculty of Theology at Wittenberg, a former Rector of Fribourg University and another the product of the Law Faculty at the University of Paris.

Let's be clear, it's not an inevitable outcome of having engaged in M-level studies at a university-sector institution in Europe that equips you to be a dynamic leader. But the track record remains impressive. And it is clear to see why. Let's go back to Jesus and the Gospels, where notions of groups of young people learning from a 'Master' have so many roots. Jesus used quite a clear methodology. He demonstrated inclusion, healing, dramatic action. He explained what he had done – and if people didn't

understand, he repeated the lesson from another angle. Then he said to them ‘now you go and do it in my name’.

And so let's do it

Philippus de Grevia, cynic that he was and wanting to protect his own ecclesial empire, had a jaundiced view about chartered communities of learning formed free of tight, authoritarian control of the religious seniors and episcopal visitation, but the practice grew, flourished and was a motor for change across Europe.

Bologna, or was it Paris, started a movement for change as communities of scholars, in theology, the arts, law, philosophy and medicine flourished. We stand in that great tradition. We have been privileged to live in community, to engage in Christian worship in community, to discuss, debate, be changed in our thinking, expanded in our horizons as we have interacted across the nations. Let us remember for what and why:

- To help make Christianity intelligible and life transforming to those we come into contact with;
- To turn our thoughts and ideas into action, co-operating with the Missio Dei;
- To be prepared, if called upon, to exercise servant leadership in the way of Christ for the good of humanity.

Keith G Jones
Senior Research Fellow, IBTS

Evangelical Scholars discuss Theological Education

On behalf of the Langham scholars in Europe, Doc. Dr hab. Ábrahám Kovács and the organising committee of the Debrecen Reformed Theological University (Dr Tamás Czövek, Dr Zoltán Schwáb and Dr Dóra Bernhardt) organised the Second Langham Europe International Consultation on Theological Education which took place from 9-12 May 2013 in the ‘House of Reconciliation’ Centre of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Berekfürdő, Hungary. The consultation was co-sponsored by Langham Partnership International and the Reformed Church in Hungary, with the theme ‘In Academia, for the Church’. Keynote speakers were: Tamás Béres from Budapest, Riad Kassis from Lebanon, Marcel Macelaru from Osijek, Parush Parushev from Prague and József Zsengellér from Budapest, along with participants from Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Romania, among whom were members of the IBTS academic community, alumni and current students.

The theme of theological education and the church was discussed from theological, pedagogical, historical, cultural, ecclesiological and missiological perspectives. The conference participants considered different challenges of contextualisation, credibility and the relevance of evangelical theological education. On the one hand, for it to be credible, evangelical learning has to find its legitimate place within the established academic structures of secular educational institutions. On the other hand, for it to be contextually relevant, evangelical education should be able to respond to the need and vision of faith communities which call for the education of their faithful. The conference addressed manifold issues of avoiding the dichotomy between seminary professional training for ministry and academic theological education aspiring to full recognition by the established academic standards of (non-specifically religious) university communities. It was recognised that evangelical theological education has to be guided by a bi-focal vision: a) in service of the strengthening of the identity of a faith community (through primary practices of learning in faith communities); and b) in mission to society at large and particularly to the public university to educate the whole person (through secondary practices of academic theological education).

Most of the participants at the conference work in higher education but also present were pastors and mission workers who presented papers in five different sections. This fact itself was an indication of how closely theological training and ecclesial or mission work belong together. One of the results of the consultation was the concurrence that theological

scholarship is not just a privilege of theological training institutes but, in the service of the church, the heartbeat of the church. Just as the church is in need of critical theological scholarship, theology is in need of the church so that both can fulfil their mission.

It was a privilege to have Riad Kassis present to hear his views on theological education as well as on the situation of Christians in the Middle-East. The Arab Spring, the civil war in Syria and the recent socio-political changes have brought much insecurity in people's lives in this region. Therefore, joining Open Doors' Prayer Day for Syria, led by Riad Kassis on 11th May, the participants prayed for this war-torn country.

The consultation took place in a cordial atmosphere of lively discussions and an openness and willingness to learn from each other, thus transcending geographical borders and theological traditions.

**The Revd Doc Dr Parush R Parushev
Rector, IBTS, Prague**

Book Reviews

An Experiment in Christian Internationalism A History of the European Baptist Theological Seminary

Carol Woodfin

Baptist History & Heritage, Macon, GA, 2013, 422 pages

ISBN: 978-1-57843-111-3

I have read and am now reviewing this volume by Carol Woodfin as someone who has participated in a part of the story which she narrates. I have also taken a considerable interest in how the International Baptist Theological Seminary (as it became) has developed since its beginnings in 1948. However, there is much in the painstaking detail of what Carol Woodfin has written about IBTS since 1948 that has added to my knowledge. Not only so, but I have found the way that she has written this story to be absolutely compelling.

This ‘experiment in Christian internationalism’ (words used by George Sadler, the Seminary’s first President) began in 1948 when Southern Baptists announced they would found a seminary in Europe. An SBC Foreign Mission Board (FMB) statement in that year, quoted by Woodfin, said: ‘For years European Baptists have been praying for a high-grade seminary to train the young Baptist university graduates whom God calls to be preachers, teachers, musicians and preachers’ wives [sic]. The small national Baptist seminaries can train those of meagre educational advantages.’ The rather disparaging reference to European Baptist seminaries was not a good start. Woodfin outlines clearly the various factors that contributed to the lack of enthusiasm of European Baptists for the project, one major problem being that Southern Baptists had acted without consulting other Baptist groups.

The location chosen by the FBM for the seminary was Rüschlikon, Zürich, where a fine property was purchased. Here the FMB established a faculty team, all Southern Baptist missionaries. But twenty-eight European students, representing fifteen nationalities, began, indicating that there was a willingness by Europeans to respond positively. Woodfin highlights the achievements. She quotes Günter Wagner, a German student whose life as a student and later a teacher was to be intertwined with that of the Seminary over many decades. He recalled that a German might share a room with a Dutchman who had spent many years in a Nazi forced labour camp. Here was a powerful context for reconciliation.

George Sadler's presidency of the Seminary was a temporary one and he was followed by Josef Nordenhaug, a Norwegian who had a science degree from the University of Oslo, and who had studied at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky. In 1932 he added to his Master of Theology degree a Doctorate in New Testament and Greek. His pastoral experience was in Oslo, Kentucky and Virginia, and from 1948 he had been editor of the FMB magazine, *The Commission*. Woodfin convincingly describes him as 'the right man'. He was inducted as Seminary President in September 1950. Nordenhaug had sensed the need for an international Baptist university in Europe, but wanted the work of the FBM to take place in conjunction with others, not independently. Woofin has a splendid chapter showing the very significant achievements of the ten-year presidency of Nordenhaug.

The chapter in the book on the 1960s is entitled 'Searching for Stability'. Most of the Presidents who followed Nordenhaug served for relatively short periods of time. Penrose St Amant's presidency in the 1970s was more substantial. In the later 1970s, however, and again in the mid-1980s, the Seminary's financial difficulties intensified. The possibility of closing the Seminary was mooted. Then, Woodfin argues, the work of the Seminary entered a new era in 1988 with the appointment of John David Hopper as President. Hopper had twenty-two years of missionary experience, most of it in Eastern Europe, and was theologically acceptable to the increasingly conservative leadership in the FMB.

A highly significant move took place in 1988 when ownership of the Seminary passed to the European Baptist Federation. The Seminary's ownership was now truly international. It was understood that there would be gradually declining financial support from the FBM over a period of fifteen years. However, in 1991 the FMB trustees voted to defund the Seminary within two months. The vote caused what Woodfin calls 'a firestorm of reaction' from Baptists in Europe. There had been no consultation with the European Baptist Federation leadership or Rüschlikon trustees. Trust fell to extremely low levels. The FMB trustees claimed that the Seminary was liberal, and ironically they put the spotlight on a guest professor, not from Europe, but from the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville Kentucky, Glenn Hinson, to prove the Seminary's liberalism.

John David Hopper and his wife resigned as FMB Missionaries in 1992, and other FMB missionaries followed. About 6,000 Southern Baptists had come together and formed the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) in 1991, and the mission organisation of the CBF invited the Hoppers to become their missionaries. The CBF took on a very supportive role in relation to Rüschlikon. It became clear, however, that for financial

reasons Rüschlikon would need to be sold. Relocation of the Seminary to Prague, Czech Republic, took place in 1995. Woodfin portrays vividly what a difficult period this was in the life of the Seminary. The opening of the campus in Prague took place in April 1997 and Hopper retired as President at that stage, but the difficulties were far from over. Serious tensions arose within the Seminary's leadership over the appointment of the next President. Confidence in the Seminary was badly undermined.

The upshot was an agreement by the EBF Council that in future the Seminary would concentrate on post-graduate study. Most of the academic staff left, and new staff – all Europeans – were gradually appointed, with Keith Jones, the Deputy General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, being appointed Rector. The Seminary now began to offer Master of Theology and Doctor of Philosophy degrees of the University of Wales, and the Czech Ministry of Education also granted the Seminary higher education institution status. Woodfin traces, in her narrative, the way in which many students were able to achieve Master's and Doctoral degrees in the period from 1998 to 2012 and concludes her study at the point where the Seminary is again about to move location, once more for financial reasons.

This is a summary of a story which Woodfin tells in impressive detail. She has undertaken research for this book over the course of a decade and has used a range of archive material to excellent effect. Although she has been deeply involved with the Seminary herself, and has her own views about events, she has sought to convey the differing perspectives that have existed over crucial issues. There is no attempt here to avoid the areas of painful tension and even deep division that have been a part of the Seminary's history at several points. At the same time the outstanding achievements of the Seminary, its staff and its students, are given proper weight. This is an absorbing and quite remarkable book about a remarkable and indeed unique Baptist educational institution.

Ian M Randall
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Transforming Faith Communities: A Comparative Study of Radical Christianity in Sixteenth Century Anabaptism and Late Twentieth Century Latin America

Michael Ian Bochenski

Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2013, 299 pages

ISBN 978-1-61097-811-8

Michael Bochenski, of Polish and British descent, has had a long-time fascination with the radical reformation in its historic setting and in later manifestations, such as the work amongst the base communities in Latin America.

He has published previously in this area, but this book is a more substantial work based on his doctoral thesis. Bochenski very helpfully opens up for us how Anabaptist communities explored the relationship between the text of the Bible and the life they could lead within a controlled hierarchical system. This same theme is evidenced and explored through the base communities of Latin America in the twentieth century. Bochenski seeks to explore issues both of convergence and divergence.

He argues that both groups, in their struggles against the principalities and powers, helped identify true human worth; and identifies many similarities between the early Anabaptist movement and the Latin American Liberation Theology movement, not least in the theology of martyrdom.

Bochenski lays out his thesis with forensic detail in the development of the radical reformation in the sixteenth century, with clear and reasoned assessment of the various groups involved in the polygenesis of those events which, today, we easily label ‘the Anabaptists’. Unlike many other contemporary scholars of the Anabaptist movement, he does not ignore Balthasar Hubmaier and his approach to relationships between church and state, but deals more comprehensively with the variety of Anabaptist views. Similarly with the Latin American liberation theologians, he too addresses the range of views pronounced by Gutierrez, Sobrino, Boff, Pixley and others in the Liberation Theology camp.

Bochenski aims to help us understand mission imperatives ‘from the underside’, the localised gathering communities of faith, and how they might, by the Holy Spirit, engage with our contemporary world. He provides many signs as to the possibilities of holistic Christian praxis, and his work deserves careful study by those seeking to re-evangelise Europe in effective non-imperialistic ways.

Keith G Jones
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Balthasar Hubmaier and the Clarity of Scripture: A Critical Reformation Issue

Graeme R Chatfield

Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2013, 394 pages

ISBN 978-1-61097-325-0

Graeme Chatfield from Australia is rapidly emerging as a leading scholar on the Anabaptist, Hubmaier. In this important volume Chatfield traces the work of the leading theologian of the first generation of Anabaptists, Balthasar Hubmaier, and his wrestling with the notions of humanist scholar, Desiderius Erasmus. Hubmaier followed Erasmus in believing that if authentic and early versions of the Scriptures could only be attested and authenticated, then turned into the vernacular languages of the people, then even the lowliest peasant could understand the unadulterated message of Christianity. It was no longer necessary for people to engage with the magesterium of the Catholic Church to understand the message of the Gospel; the Scriptures themselves would provide the necessary clarity and certainty of the Word of God for all.

This attitude of Erasmus, affirmed by Zwingli (initially a good friend of Hubmaier), and largely accepted by Luther, was to be rejected as the Magisterial Reformation progressed, when the Tradition of the Catholic Church was replaced by the dictates of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. Yet Hubmaier and the radical reformers sought to explore, with greater diligence, what it might mean to take the Scriptures, expose the text to the people of faith and work with the inter-action.

Chatfield sets out with three clear intentions, to explore the hermeneutic of Hubmaier by examining the whole corpus of his writings, to explore the thinking of Hubmaier in a chronological order to see how his thinking develops, and to assess the place of Hubmaier within the overall setting of the Magisterial and Radical Reformations. Chatfield achieves his three aims.

This book is essential reading for all those who want to understand Hubmaier, this critically important Anabaptist, who sits outside the classic approaches of the Magisterial Reformers, the classic understanding of the separatist Anabaptists, and the Catholic Church from whence he came. Hubmaier places himself firmly in the camp of those who affirm *sola scriptura*. Hubmaier, argues Chatfield, accepts a wider canon, including the Apocrypha. Like the Swiss Brethren, Hubmaier gives priority to the words of Christ, though he maintains the value of the First Testament. Chatfield places Hubmaier closer to Zwingli and Luther on the clarity of the word,

over against Erasmus. This ‘middle way’ between the Swiss Brethren and the Magisterial Reformers was, unfortunately, not developed sufficiently because of the arrest and martyrdom of Hubmaier.

Graeme Chatfield is to be applauded for this excellent addition to works on Hubmaier.

Keith G Jones
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